

Lift EVERY Voice and Sing!

A Study of Worship Styles, the Meaning Making of Music in Worship,
and a Postmodern Critique

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The Rev. Ronald Paul Griffen

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This professional project completed by

RONALD PAUL GRIFFEN

has been presented to and accepted by the
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partial fulfillment of the requirements of the

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Faculty Committee

Kathleen M. Black, Chairperson
Ann Taves

Dean of the Faculty

John R. Fitzmier

May 2001

Abstract

This project began with an “itch.” As a long time worship practitioner, both as music director and clergy, I had often witnessed tension and conflict within congregations over the issue of worship and music styles. Much has been written about two particular styles of worship and music, Traditional and Contemporary. The proponents of each of these styles have argued their point with conviction and vigor, but I was not satisfied with either one as a resolution to the tension and conflict congregations experienced. Nor did a blended style of worship satisfy the itch. Reflection on these tensions and conflicts raised questions about the role of music in worship; it became clear that music was often the flashpoint. I began to ask the question, “Was music, and /or music styles the reason or was music a symptom of a deeper set of issues?”

In order to “scratch” my itch I developed a survey along with an interview process designed to explore the question of the meaning making of music in worship from the standpoint of the “average person in the pew.” This process led to an awareness that conflicts over worship and music styles was a result of at least three significant issues; (i) the competing worldviews of modernity and postmodernity; (ii) the meaning making that occurs through music; and (iii) the role of *habitus*. Modernity, which insists on the ability to obtain pure absolute knowledge, is challenged by the critique of postmodernity, which insists on the relative and interpretive nature of knowledge. Music does more than provide a

function in worship. It fosters and carries meaning. Habitus affects our ability to critically reflect.

The result of my research has revealed the significance of engaging in a process of critical reflection. This process focuses on the act of worship first, and then utilizes, when appropriate, worship doctrines and principles. Through the process, tensions and conflicts are reduced, and contextually appropriate worship emerges.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

I remember the moment well. I was in my twenties, and newly hired as a music director in a large Roman Catholic Church. It was a time of great change in the Roman Catholic Church. The implementation of Vatican II was beginning to produce profound changes especially in the area of worship. My job was to lead a new kind of Catholic worship, a style of worship that *involved* the people, including music that everyone could sing. It was an exciting time. I began leading the worship service which was initially the least attended, but over time it became the most popular service for that community. It became so popular that I was asked to plan the worship and direct the music for the Christmas Eve service that year. I used the style of music that had helped our service grow, utilizing guitars, bass, keyboard and singers. Being Christmas Eve we sang all of the traditional and requisite carols, adding a few new songs with a Christmas theme. The response was enthusiastic and warm. But as I was preparing to leave for home an older man, one of the members, came up to me. He was smiling and acted as if he wanted to say something to me. As I turned to greet him his smile turned into a scowl and he grabbed my shirt with one hand while making a fist with the other as if preparing to punch me in the face. He briefly held me but then let go, and as he did he said, "I hate what you're doing to our church." I will never forget that Christmas Eve.

Of course I have other, less confrontational memories of church and church music. I remember growing up in a small suburban United Methodist congregation in Southern California. I could not wait to become a Fourth Grader—that was the time I could join the Children’s Choir! We sang every Sunday for that congregation and I enjoyed every minute of it. The worship service had a “four hymn” pattern to it—hymn singing, the doxology, other acclamations and choir anthems—and I cannot recall a time when anything other than the piano or organ was used to accompany the singing! At that time the guitar was never used in worship.

Then came my time of adolescence—the decade of the Sixties—and many changes took place in church worship and worship music styles. My encounter with the angry parishioner on Christmas Eve was a dramatic reminder of the changes that had taken place in the church during my own brief lifetime and the conflicts congregations have experienced through those changes. Over the years I have come to realize that the changes have continued at an increasingly rapid pace. The world of church worship and the music of worship—for so long a world of universal truths, stability and tradition—is being challenged and questioned both from outside and within. To put it another way, the church of modernity has encountered a postmodern world.

My observation of this encounter is that the activity of engagement is often music. Conflict often exists in congregations over what styles of music are acceptable in worship and I think the issue of acceptability often results from a clash between what I call modern and postmodern worldviews. It is a clash

between a modern worldview that insists upon the ability to achieve a pure, objective understanding of the world, and a postmodern response that insists upon the relative nature of understanding, which is subject to a variety of interpretations. Within this context of clash, music in a modern setting often means using only the old traditional hymns, anthems and so on, accompanied on the organ or piano, while a postmodern worship setting might include any kind of music and accompaniment that fits the particular context for that worship.

That music is a focal point makes sense. Worship is an essential aspect of any congregation's life, and music plays an important role, so the styles of music utilized in worship can and often do lead to tension and even conflict when congregants have differing views of worship and the music of worship. The results of this tension and conflict can be devastating. Congregations can become divided, no longer acting in communion. Worship becomes a source of pain and struggle among the participants rather than a time for recognizing God's presence in the world, reconciliation, and community building.

Reflection on this tension and conflict points to the possibility that the clash is between differing worship worldviews, or theologies. Are these conflicts the product of the postmodern critique of modernity? Why is music the flashpoint? Are the conflicts really about the music, or is music merely a symptom of a deeper set of issues? Why are certain forms of musical expression considered acceptable for worship while others are not? What criteria are being used by people to determine acceptable worship music? Is there such a thing as "modern" music and "postmodern" music, "traditional"

music and “contemporary” music? If so, are the styles mutually exclusive? Would a person choose to join a congregation based upon the music that is used in worship? I think these questions are fundamental to this discussion, and inherent in these questions exists the question of what music *means* to the individual and/or community that is using that music. In other words, does music provide more than a “function” in worship?

Another important question for this discussion is the role of theology. Does a theology of worship contain implicit criteria for a musical style or styles considered acceptable for that worship? If worship styles change does that imply a change in theological view as well? When guitar music was introduced into worship at my church in the sixties it seemed so radical and exciting, but did those changes mean that our understanding about God had changed as well? Many would answer, “yes” to this question but others would argue “no.” Is there a theology of worship that can embrace both the old and new styles of worship and worship music? Theologies of worship, worship styles and worship music styles are the topic for this discussion—in particular, how these theologies of worship seem to carry within them the tensions of change that accompany a move from modernism to postmodernism.

In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, theologies of worship were more clearly defined along denominational lines. For example, the sacramental nature of worship was more evident in highly liturgical churches. One thinks of Roman Catholic worship, Anglican worship and, to a lesser extent, Lutheran worship. The music style was formal, often performed only by a choir, and often-

used texts from the Psalms. Congregations were not expected to join in the singing during worship. Other denominations developed theologies of worship that emphasized the Word of God through teaching and preaching. One can recognize this emphasis in many mainline protestant denominations such as the United Methodist and Presbyterian where congregational hymn singing was introduced and used as a means of conveying denominational theology. Choirs might have performed, but the singing of the congregation was emphasized. Still others found their theologies of worship in the heart of human emotion, fed by the Holy Spirit. Singing that involved everyone was a common aspect of worship. Pentecostal churches are a good example of this style of singing.

We now live in a time that has been labeled “postmodern.”

Postmodernism is both a philosophy and a way of living that recognizes the relativity and ambiguity of human knowledge, making it critical of the notion of pure, universal knowledge. It is characterized as a time where structures and institutions that once represented the best of our culture are now being questioned about their relevance. Christianity is not immune from the postmodern world, and one of the characteristics of postmodern congregations is the blurring of denominational identity. Local churches are becoming more and more “eclectic.” Many people no longer attend a church because it is a particular denomination. They now shop for a church, and attend a church for reasons that include the location, or the music, or the programs offered. Congregations can now comprise people from a variety of denominational backgrounds, as well as many who have never had a church affiliation. Present in this multi-

denominational makeup is potential for many different experiences of worship styles, as well as little or no previous worship experiences. A further blurring of denominational identity is occurring through the continuing process of adopting, or perhaps more accurate, the re-adopting of worship practices across denominations. Since Vatican II there has been a movement toward unity of worship styles by some mainline Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church. Even Evangelical churches are recovering a more balanced action of word and sacrament in worship.¹ Add to this the potential of multicultural membership and the theologies of worship may increase even more.

Much has been written about ways to solve this problem of tensions and conflicts over appropriate worship music but very little has been written about *why* the problem may exist in the first place. Instead, and probably due in part to the concern over dwindling mainline church membership, congregations have sought to imitate churches that have succeeded with a particular solution, especially if the solution resulted in an increased membership. Churches now jump from bandwagon to bandwagon hoping to increase membership, while a serious reflection on why there is conflict has been ignored. In the meantime a congregation may grow, but at the expense of a group within that congregation that has in effect been told, “Your worship needs are no longer valid. *Ours* is the correct and appropriate way to worship. Like it or leave it.” Conflicts and tensions over issues are an inherent and normal aspect of congregational life.

¹ Robert E. Webber, *Worship is a Verb* (Nashville: Abott Martyn 1992): 10. Webber, a self described evangelical, describes experiencing a better balance between Word and Sacrament as “a better balance between the Word of God and the Table of the Lord.”

Conflicts and tensions that exist in congregations over the styles of music performed in worship arise when the various groups within the congregation each desire a familiar worship music style without acknowledging all other groups are doing the same.

Thesis

The thesis of this project is that these tensions and conflicts can be best understood through a process of reflection on the action of worship in general, and the role of music within that process in particular, as these actions and roles relate to the postmodern critique of modernity. Through a reflection, understanding and description of this critique—and especially its impact on the meaning-making aspect of music in worship—a new way to talk about and engage in worship might emerge.

Definition of Major Terms

Several key terms will need to be defined for this project. Among them are the following:

Traditional Worship

Traditional Worship is understood variously as honoring, praising and worshipping God; offering Christ for human acceptance; an activity where a new relationship is effected between God and the individual; the communal living out of the Kingdom of God. It has a structure that typically includes Gathering, Proclamation of the Word, Response and Sending Forth. Traditional Worship is also understood to be the worship that one “grew up” with that contains many elements of the past. Music styles in traditional worship include hymns from

acceptable hymnals, anthems, classical music, and what is often referred to as sacred music.

Contemporary Worship

This is a worship style that includes “a visual experience, not much quiet time, and indigenous music that is plugged-in and turned-up.”² Tim Wright uses this definition: “The attempt to relate to God in the language of the people. As that language changes, so does the style, but not the substance and center of worship.”³ Contemporary Worship is also understood to be worship that does not dwell on the past. Its structure is often but not always that of “Praise and Worship,” defined below.

Praise and Worship

Praise and Worship is a particular style of worship. It usually consists of a long period of singing, which is the praise, and an equal time of Bible-based teaching, and prayer which is the worship.

Seeker Service

A seeker service will be understood here as a worship service that is focused primarily on unchurched persons. They are not “religious,” but are seeking answers to their spiritual questions. In Seeker worship “as much as possible, religious barriers are removed—that is, religious terms are recast into contemporary language; contemporary music, rather than organ music, is used;

² Tim and Jan Wright, Eds. *Contemporary Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997): 18.

³ Ibid, 24.

the messages deal with everyday life from a gospel perspective.”⁴ Seeker services are often structured around the Praise and Worship model.

Praise Music

Praise music is a contemporary style of music that emphasizes a simple, repeated phrase that can be easily learned and sung. It also refers to music that is performed by a music team, or group/band for the worshippers. Praise music is often localized. That is to say the people who perform it locally write the music.

Tradition

Tradition refers to the whole history of the Christian church, in all of its diversity, passed on from generation to generation. For example, baptism and the Lord’s Supper are a part of the tradition of the Christian church. It is the witness of Christian faith spanning two millennia.

Traditional

Traditional aspects are those things that a particular church or congregation regard as important in their religious practices. It may be traditional in one congregation to baptize by “sprinkling” while in another it is traditional to immerse the person being baptized. Traditional aspects can change over time, however they are usually rooted in particular understandings of Christian tradition in a given era.

Traditionalism

Traditionalism is “the dead faith of living people. When faith is encapsulated in particular forms, words, and routines without the vitality of vision,

⁴ Ibid, 25

compassion and the Holy Spirit's life transforming power, the deadly result is traditionalism."⁵

Vertical Worship

Worship has two essential dimensions. The vertical dimension affirms the transcendent "otherness" of God. Vertical worship emphasizes in both word and action the God who is "out there." A danger inherent in vertical worship is the focus on the personal aspect of worship, a limited participation with others at worship and the loss of a sense of community.

Horizontal Worship

Horizontal worship emphasizes the communal presence of God who dwells within. Horizontal worship recognizes, in both word and action, the incarnated presence of God. A danger inherent in horizontal worship is an over emphasis on the presence of the community that the community becomes self-absorbed.

Liturgical Worship

Liturgical worship is highly structured and utilizes formula prayers, creeds, traditional hymns and quiet time. This style of worship focuses on those who are believers, as opposed to those who are seekers.

Work Done Previously

Research for this discussion revealed that most of the literature on worship, music in worship and the conflicts in congregations over worship and worship music styles focuses on two kinds of worship—traditional and

⁵ Daniel Benedict and Craig Miller, *Contemporary Worship for the 21st Century* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1995): 122.

contemporary. In *Contemporary Worship for the 21st Century*, Dan Benedict and Craig Miller use the concepts of “push” and “pull” when defining worship. They define worship as a response to God’s continual acting on humanity’s behalf that “represents a core of Christian hymns, prayers and practices through the centuries.”⁶ But our understanding of God, and therefore the ways we worship God are influenced by culture. This “pull” of culture continually causes us to reevaluate what we are doing when we are worshipping, and how we experience God’s presence and grace. How congregations address the problem of conflict over appropriate music for worship, according to Benedict, ought to include this push/pull dynamic in their discussions.

Thomas H. Troeger and Carol Doran liken the conflicts in congregations to tribal warfare. Persons with different worship theologies do battle over what each thinks is appropriate music for worship. Some want hymns while others want rock and roll. Some want to change the language of the music so that it is more inclusive and others claim that sacred music should not be changed from its original form for any reason. Music, it seems, has a function in worship. But what are the results of that function? Troeger and Doran state that, “We have seen that music may bear deeper meanings than we initially suspected, including the burden of our ambivalence to God. In addition to this theological weight, music often carries with it the force of personal memory.”⁷

According to the Roman Catholic Bishop’s Committee on the Liturgy, “The function of music is ministerial; it must serve and never dominate. Music should

⁶ Ibid, 8

⁷ Carol Doran and Thomas H. Troeger, *Trouble at the Table* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992) : 66.

assist the assembled believers to express and share the gift of faith that is within them and to nourish and strengthen their interior commitment of faith.”⁸ So far in this discussion, the emphasis is on the conflicts in congregations of believers.

Increasingly, Christianity is finding itself living in a world that is not Christian.

William M. Easum writes that,

“Throughout our history, North America and other places influenced by the European Reformation, worship was based on three things: (1) the printed page, (2) a sixteenth century appreciation of music, and (3) a culture that embraced Christianity. *All three of these foundations are disappearing from the post-World War II European cultures.* These changes are being driven by two phenomena.

The first is television, especially MTV, which is exported all over the world. Its fast-paced, ever-changing, plugged-in-and-turned-up, visually oriented culture is making it harder than ever for the average young adult to experience the gospel in traditional worship.

The second phenomenon is the rise of a generation of people who did not receive *any spiritual or religious instruction* from the home, school or community.”⁹

The conflicts over appropriate music for worship are not simply between tribes of believers. It includes tribes of seekers and non-believers as well.

For seekers and non-believers there is no connection to Christian tradition or to traditional church structures and actions in worship. To use the terminology of Benedict and Miller, there is no push for seekers—only pull. This presents one difficulty with finding a way to resolving congregational conflicts over music in worship. Accordingly, those who favor contemporary worship styles say we cannot rely solely on Christian tradition as the means for resolution. But is

⁸U.S. Catholic Bishop’s Committee on the Liturgy, *Music in Catholic Worship*, Vol. III, “The Place of Music in the Celebration: Music Serves the Expression of Faith” (1967) no. 23.

⁹ Contemporary Worship, 17. Emphasis mine.

Christian Tradition something that can, or ought to be discarded? An alternative is needed, one that can account for the seeker as well as the believer.

Up to now the discussion of an alternative way for resolving congregational conflict over appropriate worship music has fallen within two styles of worship. While neither traditional nor contemporary worship is exclusive of the other, each nevertheless contains a particular emphasis that underlies all that it represents. The first, represented in this discussion by Troeger and Doran, Benedict and Miller, believes that worship is first and foremost a formative experience built upon Christian Tradition. This theology of worship assumes that those worshipping have already discovered God in their lives, and are responding to that discovery. The purpose of worship, then, is to carry on the faith tradition of the church through common hymns, prayers and actions grounded in Christian history. In that way worship helps to form the community identity as Christian. One of the criticisms of this description of worship is that it does not adequately account for the needs of seekers and non-believers, nor does it respond quickly enough to the pull of culture.

The second, represented here by Easum and Wright, believes that worship is evangelical, and while Christian Tradition is somehow important, worship is not necessarily the place in which it is carried on. That is, worship is essentially a means for presenting the Gospel message to people who have never heard it before, or heard it so long ago that it has been forgotten. Worship becomes an evangelical tool, and is performed by believers primarily for non-believers and seekers. Christian formation essentially takes place elsewhere.

One criticism of this theology of worship is that, while it attempts to meet the needs of seekers and non-believers, its primary focus is on a particular group of seekers and non-believers. Commonly, but not accurately referred to as the Baby-boomers¹⁰, this target group is essentially Euro-American, well educated, and affluent. The richness of cultural diversity is expressed in limited ways, if at all, due to this focus.

It appears the movement of the discussion about worship so far has been oriented toward an either/or solution, either traditional/formative or contemporary/evangelical. To be sure, finding ways to resolve the conflicts in congregations over music in worship must include both views, but these views are both shaped by a modernism. Postmodernism—and the worship styles it can and does produce—reflects a more culturally and ethnically diverse picture of our world. One of the purposes of this project has been, in part, to include ethnically and culturally diverse believers, non-believers, seekers and people of all ages in the discussion.

Scope and Limitations of the Project

The focus of this project will be worship styles and music styles in worship. The question will be how these various styles relate to various theologies of worship. The central activity within this focus will be a project survey and follow-up small group discussions intended to understand more clearly why music is important for people, and why certain music is recognized as “worship music.” A

¹⁰ Not all Baby Boomers are well educated, affluent or Euro-American. Those who write about the so-called “megachurches” (for instance Rick Warren in his book *The Purpose Driven Church*) name their target group in such a way.

discussion of various theologies of worship will be included in the examination of these survey results, as well as reflection on ways congregations might use this information to develop theologies of worship that include the postmodern critique of modernity.

Procedure for Integration

This paper is a theological reflection integrated with a practical, or functional foundation. As stated above, the literature on the subject of worship—both worship as theology and practice—generally speaks about two kinds or styles of worship, “traditional” and “contemporary.” The intention of this survey project is to engage in a “dialogue” with this literature, and include a discussion of the postmodern critique of modernity. The results of this reflection will be the integration of the survey results as they reveal the meaning-making role of music in worship, and how that role might relate to a postmodern style of worship.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 2 Worship Style, Music Style and Postmodernism

We begin by asking the questions, “What is worship?” “What does worship do?” and “Why worship?” The purpose of this chapter will be to discuss worship styles and music styles in worship. What is the role of music in worship? The discussion will focus on the revelation/response/reflection dynamic of worship. Two styles of worship, traditional and contemporary, will be described along with a brief discussion, and explanation of postmodernism as it relates to this project.

Chapter 3 Design, Implementation and Results of the Project Survey

This chapter will focus on the project survey, its design, implementation and results. Included will be a description of the process for designing the survey, implementation of the survey, the small group interview process and the results. There will be a brief discussion of two follow up questions that were asked of the participants after the completion of the initial interviews.

Chapter 4 Interpreting the Results

How did the participants respond to the survey and small group interviews? This chapter will focus on the significance of critical reflection in the worship process, and the meaning making of music as revealed through the survey and interviews. The concept of *habitus* will be discussed in relation to critical reflection and meaning making. We will also discuss the postmodern issue of “sameness” and “otherness” as it relates to the conflicts in congregations over music and worship styles.

Chapter 5 Where Do We Go From Here?

Here we will summarize where we have come from and reflect on where we might go in the future. Does our thesis work? What does it mean to engage in creating contextually appropriate worship? Is there actually a style of worship that could be called postmodern? We will examine the process that produced three different approaches to contextually appropriate worship through case studies. In conclusion we will discuss the implications of this research for further work and reflection.

Chapter 2

Worship Style, Music Style and Postmodernism

“O how many congregations were torn and rent in sunder, by the desire of ministers and some leading individuals to bring about an improvement in the cultivation of music, by forming choirs of singers...And there are many churches now who would not tolerate an organ. They would not be half so much excited to be told that the sinners are going to hell, as to be told that there is going to be an organ in the meeting house...”¹¹
--Charles G. Finney, 1835

From the very beginnings of Christian worship, music has had a role in the human process of connecting, through Christ, to God. Throughout the history of the church music has been an integral part of the practice of Christian worship. Throughout the history of the church there has also been tension over what kinds and styles of music are acceptable for worship, a tension present today in many congregations through conflicts over what has been termed “contemporary” versus “traditional” music. While the terms “contemporary” and “traditional” music remain ambiguous, the lines drawn by Christians between “traditional” hymns and “contemporary” praise songs have led to vigorous debate concerning the merits of one particular style of music over another when used in worship.

¹¹ Charles G. Finney, “Measures to Promote Revivals” *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, William G. McLoughlin, ed., (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960): 256-257, 273.

I recently received notice that a local United Methodist church was searching for a new choir director. Their choir director of thirty-four years had resigned. When I inquired about the seemingly sudden resignation of their long-time director I was told that because of changes in the worship service the choir director had “quit.” Further conversation revealed that the changes that caused such a significant reaction from the choir director involved *adding* (not replacing) some contemporary songs to the worship service. The choir director felt so strongly that classical music was the only style of music acceptable for worship that he quit a position he had held for almost half of his life. Along with the choir director’s resignation several members of the church left in protest over the changes. Why did this happen?

In order to address this question we will begin by asking other questions. “What is worship?” “What do we do in worship?” And finally, “Why worship?” One of my seminary professors used to say, “Every text has a context.” If we make the text of our discussion here the story of the choir director who resigned rather than use music other than classical¹² music in worship, then the context for this chapter is worship and music styles, and their differences. In order to examine worship styles and music styles we will begin by defining worship, what it is, what it does and why we do it.

What is worship? Defining Christian worship is not easy. A definition I favor is “an action done by God and people for the benefit of the whole world.”

¹² While the music styles of Traditional Worship include the classical genre, the choir director in this example used the term “classical” to mean all of what he considered to be appropriate, traditional worship music.

Let me explain what I mean. One of the earliest words used to describe Christian worship was the Greek word *leitourgia* from which we derive the English word liturgy. It originally had a secular meaning, “a work of the people done for the benefit of all.” For example, if an individual or group of people built a bridge for their community, and everyone could use the bridge without charge, the act of building the bridge would be considered *leitourgia*. As Christianity grew in numbers the word was appropriated for use in describing Christian worship, and understanding why the word liturgy was “Christianized” is helpful for understanding and defining Christian worship. It is what makes Christian worship different from any other act. Christian worship is “bridge building.” That is to say Christian worship is an action done for the benefit of all. But what does this action entail, who is involved in the action and what is the benefit received?

When I studied liturgy at the University of Notre Dame, Joseph Powers, a Jesuit professor of liturgical theology, introduced definitions for *faith* and *Christian faith* that helped my understanding of the distinctiveness of Christian worship. Powers said that faith was the recognition of God in all things, and Christian faith was the recognition of God in all things *through the person Jesus Christ—dead and risen*. Similarly, Paul W. Hoon, in his book *The Integrity of Worship* speaks of this act of recognition as an interaction of revelation and response.¹³ This influential United Methodist scholar wrote that God continually reveals Godself to humankind through Jesus Christ, and humankind continually responds to God’s

¹³ Paul W. Hoon, *The Integrity of Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971): 77.

revelation through words, actions, and emotions. This revelation/response is embedded in the context of human understanding. That is to say God is known through a human presence—Jesus Christ—and is recognized and affirmed by people through this same person—Jesus Christ. In part, the answer to the question, “What is worship?” is to say that worship is *incarnational, Christological, historical and contextual*.

Christian worship is the action—the “bridge building” that connects God to us, us to God, and us to the larger world. Christian worship is directly connected to the gospel story of salvation; it is the act of remembering the whole event of Jesus Christ¹⁴. But the act of remembering is not one of simply recollecting something that happened a long time ago. Through worship the Christ event transcends history, and is brought into the present. The Christological nature of Christian worship is a reflection of the Christian life. Hoon claims that all we do as Christians is affected by worship, which makes the Christian life a liturgical life, and a liturgical life is lived not only for the community, but also for the whole world. So we can say that, in part, Christian worship is an “*action between God and people done for the benefit of the whole world*.” God’s part in the action is to continually reveal who God is through the Christ event. Our part is to respond to God’s revelation through Christ in ways that help us live into life with God.

¹⁴ I am using the term “event” to denote the life story of Jesus as fully expressed through scripture, as well as the story of Jesus acted out through Christian worship over the centuries.

These actions involve words, symbols and practices, but Christian worship is not only an action, it is also a *theological expression*.

Theology is the interpretive process of critical and reflective thinking about who (or what) God is. The theological aspect of worship is the interpretive process of critical, reflective thinking about who God is through the active response of people at worship. In other words, the act of worship provides the “stuff” upon which one reflects about God. From this critical reflection emerges a cogent understanding of God. In that sense my understanding of the term “theology of worship” might be better expressed by the phrase “worship is theology.” That is to say worship is our expressed human understanding of God that is then critically evaluated and reflected upon.

In his book *Worship As Theology*, Professor Saliers makes a distinction between the terms “theology of worship”, and “worship as theology.” It is a distinction between “the theology realized in the liturgical act from theological reflection that follows from it.”¹⁵ This is an important distinction for Saliers. What makes this distinction important is the belief that human knowledge about God is always fallible and subject to critical evaluation. Worship—the primary expression of knowledge of God (Hoon’s revelation/response) is theology. Theology is a human endeavor that needs the balance of critical evaluation to test the limits of its understanding, and for Saliers the process always works in that order. There is first the “response,” the act of worship, and then there is

¹⁵ Don E. Saliers, *Worship As Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994): 16.

critical reflection. Worship is first because it is our human response to God's revelation through Christ. Without that revelation we have nothing upon which to reflect. Worship emerges out of the Christ event; that is to say God's continual revelation through Jesus Christ. First there is worship—our response to God's revelation—and then there is critical reflection.

Critical reflection has always been a part of Christian tradition, and has produced a body of doctrinal documents concerning worship. In particular these documents have been used to determine what constitutes appropriate Christian worship, including appropriate music for worship. When we trace the developmental process of these documents—and their subsequent doctrines—we can see an ongoing process of reflection and revision. However, the modernist assumption that pure knowledge is obtainable, when applied to doctrines of Christian worship, has led to the loss of any critical evaluation of those doctrines. In other words the rubrics—the instructions—about how to “do” worship have become inflexible. In this understanding of worship, or theology of worship, the loss of critical reflection leads to loss of the process that has always been a part of Christian tradition. In Saliers' words a theology of worship taken out of order “usually takes the form of applying already formulated theories or doctrines to the ‘practices’ of prayer [worship].”¹⁶ Worship as theology understands that “critical thinking is secondary and therefore derivative of the first-order theology shown in praying to God.”¹⁷ And so Saliers adds critical reflection as the means for making theology intelligible to Hoon's dynamic of

¹⁶ Ibid, 70.

¹⁷ Ibid, 71.

revelation/response. Keep in mind that this is a dynamic always in process. We turn next to the question “What do we do in worship?”

Andy Langford names four elements or actions—things we do in worship—that are grounded in Christian tradition and history.¹⁸ They are (1) Word of God, read, proclaimed and received; (2) Sacraments, Baptism and The Lord’s Supper; (3) Prayer and Affirmation; and (4) Fellowship, through word and sign. Traditional worship style has been described at various times as having three or four “actions” or movements within it. First there is the action of “gathering.” People gather to worship. Second is the action of “listening.” We listen to God through the words and prayers, Scripture and sermon, and hymns. Third, we “respond.” This action is sometimes placed together with listening and is described as more of an interaction. The most visible action of responding is communion; we respond by doing what Jesus told us to do. Finally we “depart.” It has been said that Christians gather in worship precisely so that they may depart. As to what happens between gathering and departing—the actions and theological reflection of worship—help us “live into” God’s realm. Another way of saying this is to say the “style” of worship is formational. Through this worship style people are formed into the people of God.

There is another worship style called “contemporary worship” that emphasizes doing things somewhat differently from traditional worship. A Contemporary worship service is often called a “Praise and Worship” service. It

¹⁸ Andy Langford, *Blueprints For Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993)

is a different style of worship compared to a Traditional worship service. A Contemporary worship service, or Praise and Worship service has two basic elements, although it still contains the actions of gathering and departing. The first action, or element is what we call “praise.” Praise is a period of singing that can last for half of the service. Praise choruses and songs are sung, led by a praise band. The music is “pop” in style, and is often amplified. The second element of the service is called “worship.” The worship is a lengthy teaching and sermon based on Scripture. This element would take up the second half of the service. Elements such as prayer, greeting, and calling to worship do not hold a fixed place within the structure of contemporary worship, although they are usually woven into the praise and worship service. According to authors on the subject the purpose of a contemporary, or Praise and Worship service is often to attract Seekers and unchurched people. This differs from a traditional service where Christian formation is the purpose¹⁹. The purpose in a contemporary, or Praise and Worship service is evangelical. In other words a contemporary service designed for Seekers and unchurched people is meant to present the Gospel of Christ as an invitation into Christian discipleship. Christian formation can take place *after* the person has said, “yes” to that invitation. In churches where Praise and Worship is the primary worship one can often find other kinds of services at times of the week other than Sunday where formation takes place.

¹⁹ Note that this particular discussion describes the defined purposes of traditional and contemporary worship. In reality we experience much more ambiguity in actual worship settings. Many churches offer contemporary style worship services that are regularly attended by the faithful.

Both traditional and contemporary worship styles contain particular music styles as well.

Traditional worship has a music style that is different from contemporary worship, but these style differences are not simply between classical and rock music. Those who speak from both sides of the discussion claim that music must be relevant to the “audience.” What does that mean? The formational position says that the hymns and anthems of the church are important means of continuing the tradition whereas the evangelical position says that music is important only when it can connect with Seekers or unchurched folk. The choir director in our story understood worship as first and foremost a formational event. Traditional music, hymns and the classics, were the means of continuing the tradition for him. The decision to add elements that were more evangelical—that is geared more for Seekers and unchurched people—did not make sense to the choir director. But why is the choir director so rigid in his thinking? Why resign? Something seems to be left out of this choir director’s decision-making process. I think that “something” is the place and role of theological reflection.

The definition of Christian worship as revelation/response/reflection, when taken out of order, places the wrong emphasis upon the reflective action. In its proper order Christian worship is first a response to God’s revelation followed by reflection. To repeat the words of Saliers, a theology of worship in which the emphasis on reflection “usually takes the form of applying already formulated theories or doctrines to the ‘practices’ of prayer [worship]”²⁰ is putting the

²⁰ Saliers, 70.

emphasis on the wrong thing. Worship as theology understands that “critical thinking is secondary and therefore derivative of the first-order theology shown in praying to God.”²¹ Our choir director acted out of his adherence to already formulated theories or doctrines about worship resulting in his resignation, the departure of some choir members and a wounded congregation. This conflict over acceptable music for worship is a good example of the inflexibility that develops when the critical reflective process is discarded in place of the application of already formulated theories or doctrines to the musical practices of worship. However, when the priority is placed upon the act of worship itself, theology emerges that can then be reflected upon critically. In this context it is more important to reflect upon what music people actually use (or in this case what a congregation might want to use!) in worship, and the revelation/response the music mediates, rather than what “should” be used. This is an alternative to the current argument over acceptable music for worship that revolves around “traditional” music versus “contemporary” music.

The last question we asked was, “Why worship?” The intent of this question is to focus on worship in a postmodern context. Before we attempt an answer we must ask what it means to say “postmodern.” Postmodernism is many things. It is a collection of theories. William Stacy Johnson writes that,

“The first comprehensive theorist of postmodernity, Jean-Francis Lyotard, argues that our age has precipitated nothing less than a transformation in the status of knowledge. This transformation is marked by an ‘incredulity toward metanarratives,’ a refusal to give credence to the grand explanatory narratives

²¹ Ibid, 71.

that once defined Western culture. The result is a pervasive cynicism toward the institutions, values, and lofty goals of the past.”²²

A postmodern worldview questions the concept of universal truth—the ability to have clear and undistorted knowledge. All knowledge is relative and subject to interpretation. In that sense postmodernism is deconstructive because it breaks down the conceptual model that gives order and points out the ambiguities of that order. Postmodernism is also more than a theory or group of theories. It is a way of living in the world. The so-called Generation “X” and Millennial Generation—those born after 1966—have always lived in a postmodern world.

It is also a multicultural world. Not just an ethnically diverse world, but also a world where social and technological changes have widened the gap between generations to the point that generational “cultures,” the embodiment of different generations, co-exist. Postmodern culture is not one-dimensional. Rather, it is a collection of many cultures each with a particular focus and identity. This vast diversity of what we might call sub-cultures within culture has resulted in what Tom Beaudoin refers to as “a permanent lack of consensus on what is true within culture and within religious institutions.”²³ This lack of consensus has led to an ethical and cultural polarization, ambiguity over identity, both personal and communal, and often an “either/or” response to issues. Do different generations—as we hoped to observe through the interview process of

²² William Stacy Johnson, “Rethinking Theology,” *Interpretation* (January 2001): 5. The quote is taken from J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984)

²³ From a lecture given by Tom Beaudoin, October 2000 at “Next Church” conference sponsored by Cal-Pac Conference of the United Methodist Church, Ontario California. He is referring to his book *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998).

this project—respond differently to their surroundings? It would seem so. For example, my father and mother grew up in a world where reading was an important form of entertainment. I grew up in a world where television replaced reading, and my children and grandchildren are growing up in a world of “interactive” entertainment generated through their use of personal computers. When our three generations worship together I might think the experience is “just right” while Dad and Mom think it is a little too “contemporary,” and the kids are bored because everything happens so slowly. No wonder there are conflicts in congregations over acceptable music in worship! The question is do these generational cultures and their different worldviews produce different views about God? If so, do these differing views of God lead to different ideas about why we worship?

Summary

We began this chapter by asking the questions, “What is worship?” “What does worship do?” and “Why worship?” The questions arose out of a story told of a conflict between a choir director and congregation over the style of music used in worship. Attempting to understand why such a conflict could arise we have identified three styles of worship, which we have called traditional, contemporary and postmodern. The traditional style emphasizes the formational character of worship, the contemporary style emphasizes the evangelical character of worship and the postmodern style emphasizes the contextual, relational, ambiguous character of worship. To be sure, there are variations and combinations of these three styles of worship but one of these is typically

dominant in any given congregation. While all worship may contain elements of traditional, contemporary and postmodern styles the question we have raised here is of the role of theological reflection in the worship process. Is theological reflection simply directed toward already formulated doctrines and practices? Or is theological reflection directed toward what is done in worship? Are we worshipping first, then reflecting or are we merely relying on doctrines and practices when worshipping? The story of the choir director indicates that a focus on doctrines and practices first can result in conflict and disruption.

But do these differing styles of worship imply a particular style of music for worship? I believe the answer is “yes.” I also believe that the styles of music in worship either support or detract from the underlying theological emphasis of a particular worship style, which leads to the conflicts that occur over acceptable music for worship. For example, as defined, the very nature of a possible postmodern worship style makes it difficult to use music styles and music texts that support patriarchal structures and rituals that are acceptable in both the traditional and contemporary worship. In other cases changes in texts of music as well as the musical style would be unacceptable for those whose worship style is traditional and even contemporary. For them, changing the text is tantamount to changing God. Both traditional and contemporary styles struggle with the postmodern critique of worship that questions patriarchal rituals, language and music themes.

Finding ways to resolve the conflicts in congregations over music in worship must first critique all of the variations of these different styles of worship.

Rather than questioning whether worship is first a formative act or an evangelical one is similar to the argument over whether worship is first the glorification of God or the sanctification of humanity. I think a more positive contribution to this discussion begins with revisiting the notion that worship is theology.

Chapter 3

Design, Implementation and Results of the Project Survey

“...at the heart of Christian worship is the formation and transformation of Christian identity—both individual and corporate—through the mysterious workings of the Holy Spirit...In worship we offer our own limited worldviews and distorted values unto a God who can, through the Spirit’s workings, extend our myopic vision and correct our astigmatisms. And in worship, we enter a realm in which we ourselves—through the singing of hymns, offering of prayers, and participation in various ritual acts—engage in a dance of faith that also serves as dress rehearsal for faithful and transformed living in the realm of God’s reign.”²⁴
--Leonora Tubbs Tisdale

In the previous chapter we discussed the action of worship. In this chapter we will focus on the process of gathering information about the role of music within worship in the hope that we might understand why music can be such a point of contention in congregations. I believe the question whether music is the source of the conflict or a symptom of a deeper set of issues is important. Speaking directly to the conflicts that can arise in congregations Bill Easum, in his book *Dancing With Dinosaurs: Ministry in a Hostile and Hurting World* makes the observation that “The shift in the style of worship is the most obvious and divisive.”²⁵ Implicit in this new style of worship is the presence of new music styles. Indeed Easum makes the claim that music plays a key role in worship as a “major vehicle for celebration and communication” and he is not

²⁴ Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997): 56.

²⁵ William M. Easum, *Dancing With Dinosaurs: Ministry in a Hostile and Hurting World* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993: 81.

alone in this assessment. Rev. John Bisagno, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, states,

“Long-haired music, funeral-dirge anthems and stiff-collared song leaders will kill the church faster than anything in the world...There are no great, vibrant, soul-winning churches reaching great numbers of people, baptizing hundreds of converts, reaching masses, that have stiff music, seven-fold amens and a steady diet of classical anthems. None. That’s not a few. That’s none, none, none.”²⁶

Frank Church Brown takes exception to Easum’s observations and offers some of his own. Adapted from his book, *Good Taste, Bad Taste, and Christian Taste* Brown’s primary critique centers on Easum’s claims that first, “numbers” equals religious and musical quality. Is the best measure of quality simply the fact that lots of people respond to it? Second, what people like for musical entertainment is the same kind of music people want in worship. Third, musical and religious quality is equal to “accessibility.” This is like Easum’s “numbers” argument; if the music is accessible for people then it must be high quality. Fourth, music is merely functional. That is, people cannot expect to achieve any sense of Christian identity through music alone. Countering these four assumptions Brown quotes literary and cultural critic George Steiner who says,

“Music is brimful of meanings which will not translate into logical structures or verbal expression...Music is at once cerebral in the highest degree—I repeat that the energies and form-relations in the playing of a quartet, in the interactions of voice and instrument are among the most complex events known to man—and it is at the same time somatic, carnal and a searching out of resonances in our bodies at levels deeper than will or consciousness.”²⁷

²⁶ Ibid, 85.

²⁷ Frank Church Brown, “A Matter of Taste?” *Christian Century*, September 13-20, (2000): 910.

Brown maintains that the appropriateness of music for worship can be determined “but its character and purpose will shift accordingly, with convention playing a role in shaping those choices.”²⁸ As we can see, the debate is fully engaged and fully engaging!

Rather than look to the views of both scholars and pastors, I chose to develop an interview/survey that would allow individuals to come up with their own answers. The process involved developing an interview/survey, finding groups and individuals willing to participate in the survey process, collecting and evaluating the information, and drawing some conclusions. Following is a description of the rationale, development and implementation of the survey, as well as a description of the group interviews conducted regarding the survey, and finally a presentation of the results of the responses.

The purpose of the survey was to gather information about people who actively participated in worship, and to elicit their thoughts and feelings about the role of music in worship. I decided to limit this study to United Methodist congregations and deliberately limited this group for two reasons. The first was the desire for a manageable study group. I considered using several different denominations for the study, but decided that denominational differences about worship (indeed about God, the church, humanity and creation as well) would add layers of information that would move this study far beyond the scope of this project. I believed that there was enough diversity of opinion within United Methodism to provide adequate information for this study. Secondly, through the

²⁸ Ibid, 911.

United Methodist General Board of Discipleship I had access to a national sampling for this interview/survey when limited to United Methodist churches.

The goal of the survey was to gather information and then “exegete” the respondents much like we would exegete a congregation. Congregational exegesis has been helpful as a way of identifying and understanding congregations and the many, diverse groups that contribute to the “identity” of a congregation. In this regard, Leonora Tubbs Tisdale’s *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* influenced the development of my survey. As noted at the beginning of this chapter Tubbs Tisdale recognizes the role of music as a part of the “formation and transformation of Christian identity.” It was my suspicion that the role of Christian identity—both individual and corporate—was at the heart of my questions about music and worship, and that the interplay of influence between music and one’s worldview was significant in shaping one’s identity.

I think one of the strengths of the postmodern critique of modernity is the recognition of diversity within unity. Even seemingly homogeneous congregations can have diverse worldviews due to generational differences, class differences (working class, “white collar” workers, professional workers), gender differences and so on. We noted in Chapter 2 how some of the recent conversations within worship literature debate whether worship is primarily evangelical or formational. The issue I wrestled with as I developed this survey was if the answer was “evangelical” then it follows that music serves a function. This function was to help the church by “connecting” seekers and unchurched folk through “speaking their musical language.” The familiarity of secular music

styles, when used in religious music helps create a zone of comfort for the seekers and unchurched as well as a zone of connection for the evangelizers. But what if music is more than “function?” What if music contributes to the formation of identity? What if music “makes meaning?” And if so, how? I set out to design a survey that might help me answer these questions.

Leonora Tubbs Tisdale outlines a method for congregational exegesis I found useful for developing the survey. She outlines “Seven Symbols for Congregational Exegesis.”²⁹ Hearing people’s stories, reviewing archival materials, checking demographics, attention to architecture and visual arts, how people ritualize, noting important events and activities and spending time with the people themselves are powerful tools when seeking to understand congregations. As we can see, not all of these would be practical for this survey, but two in particular—the people and their stories became the focus of my attention. The follow up interviews became a critical aspect of the survey. It is the people themselves who have provided the text that made this exegesis possible. The interview/survey that I developed for this study can be found in the Appendix .

I divided the survey into five sections, or blocks of questions, that were related to each other. The general headings for these sections could be named General Information, Music Interests, Thoughts about God, Humanity and Creation, and Church. Questions 1-12 are basic information questions. They

²⁹ Tisdale, 64.

allowed me to make distinctions between respondents in areas such as age, church attendance, style of worship (traditional or contemporary) and what the respondent thought about the quality of the worship in their church. Questions 13-34 were oriented specifically to the music preferences of the respondent both in and outside of worship. I wanted to see if there were differences about how one felt about music when in a worship setting, and also if those feelings changed if the worship setting changed as well. For example, when asked if certain styles of music were unacceptable for worship, I asked if those styles would be acceptable in a worship setting outside of the church such as a retreat or camp. Questions 35-39 were "God" questions. I wanted to find out how the respondent perceived God when asked directly about God. The question that guided my questions was what "kind" of God—what image of God—were people experiencing when singing, if any? My intention was to compare their answers about God with their answers to the music questions related to God (questions 29-30). Questions 40-45 focused on one's understanding of humanity and humanity's relation to creation. This was important for my understanding of how people related God to creation. Was there a relationship? Or was God simply "out there" somewhere, unrelated to creation. In worship we speak of the vertical and horizontal dimensions. The relationship of humanity and creation to God experienced through music would hopefully be revealed through these questions.

I wanted to find out how respondents understood the concept of "church" in questions 45-52. Church can be a complex notion. Is church something people only "join" or belong to? Or is church also the Body of Christ? Is church

either/or? Is it both/and? How does music influence (or not influence) one's understanding of church?

I began the process of conducting the survey by posting an announcement regarding the survey with the United Methodist General Board of Discipleship, Nashville, Tennessee. I am indebted to Dean McIntyre and Dan Benedict for their support and cooperation in this effort. I received 131 responses via e-mail. A survey was e-mailed to all those who indicated a desire to participate. From those 131 responses I received 55 completed surveys within the agreed timeframe. I also arranged four small group interviews with the Southern California United Methodist churches. The groups ranged in size from 5 to 12, and were held in September and October 2000. These focus groups are not representative of any kind of standard based upon population or demographics, but were formed through the response of the individual respondents. By "posting" a request for people to participate in an interview/survey on the United Methodist worship bulletin board that is a part of the UM web site, I was automatically limiting the responses, and in that context the interview/survey is biased.

Nevertheless I believe that the results of the interview/survey can be helpful. First, this study was meant to focus on a particular group: United Methodists. Second, all of the respondents reported that conflict within their congregations was present, in varying degrees, over the styles of music that were considered acceptable for worship. The final activity of the survey was to pose two follow up questions, which participants responded to via e-mail. The

first question was, "What elements of worship are 'non-negotiable' for you? That is, what elements make worship worship? The second question was "Why worship?" Put another way, "What is the point of worshipping?" These questions emerged through an evaluation of the initial survey results and the small group discussions. I am including the answers to these two questions in the results section of this chapter.

Survey Results

I placed the participants' responses into three commonly identified generational groupings based upon age. Those who ranged in age from 18-34, or "Generation 'X,'" those who ranged in age from 35-54, or "Boomers" and those who ranged in age from 55 and up, or "G.I./Silents". Within those categories there were 10 X'ers, 29 Boomers and 16 G.I./Silents. Following are the results.

Questions 1-12

There were 28 Females and 27 Males who responded, the youngest being 20 and the oldest 83. Three-fourths came from urban and suburban church settings and one-fourth from rural church settings. The overwhelming majority attended church regularly (51 out of 55) with 16 attending that particular church for less than 3 years, 17 attending from 4-10 years, 7 attending from 11-20 years and 15 for more than 20 years. Only one had attended their church for less than one year, and that person indicated they were beginning membership classes at the time of taking the survey. Five had attended the same church all of their lives. Thirty responses favored "traditional" worship, 19 favored "contemporary"

worship, and 6 responses said the worship style really did not matter. All but 5 said they participated regularly in church activities.

While only 18 responses (combined) thought the church completely met either their social or spiritual needs (question 8) most indicated the significance of the church in both areas (37 total responses). Question 9 revealed that three fourths of the group attended their church because they enjoyed taking part in the worship service itself, or the feeling of meditating and communicating with God.

Question 10 reveals a sharp difference between the X'ers, G.I./Silents and the Boomers. While the Boomers mostly rated the quality of worship services at their churches in the "usually high" to "usually satisfactory" categories, the X'ers and G.I./Silents tended to agree that the quality was more in the "could be improved" to "usually unsatisfactory" categories. For X'ers and G.I./Silents the top three answers to the question, "Which of the following best describes why you continue to attend this church?" were "It's my church," "Opportunities to become actively involved in the church," and "The music program." For Boomers the top three were "Quality of friendliness and/or concern among church members," "The quality of preaching" and "The music program." Most of the respondents related the worship in their church to their ongoing faith experience as very important although 30% of both X'ers and G.I./Silents rated it as only somewhat important.

Questions 1-12 revealed the overall sense that these people were satisfied with their church experience, felt music was an important part of that

experience and saw a connection between worship and their faith development. The next set of questions provided information about music and its role in worship.

Questions 13-34

Thirty-seven of the respondents said they were musicians, 31 participated in the music program of their church. Questions 16-20 revealed what might have been expected as the first really generational differences. The X'ers were the most evenly divided with Jazz and the Blues, Folk, Sacred, Rock 'n' Roll and "Other" music categories the most popular. Boomers' top three choices were more clearly revealed as Classical, Rock 'n' Roll and Folk. The G.I./Silent folk picked Classical, Gospel and Sacred music as their favorites. All three groups listed Folk and Jazz/Blues as the top two "not acceptable" musical styles, but those who responded (12 for Rock and 4 for Folk) were a small percentage relative to the total response of all groups. Of those who answered the question why they thought a particular music style was not acceptable cited "unsuitable text," but almost all respondents agreed that any music would be acceptable in the settings described in question 20.

Most answers rated their church's music program as very important to somewhat important, and excellent to good for questions 21 and 22. Interestingly all age groups listed hymns/congregational singing, anthems sung by the choir and organ music as their top three preferences in question 23. Praise music was a close fourth followed by instrumental music. All but 5 people

said their personal involvement in singing was very important. Only one said they did not sing.

In asking for explanations to why people had certain favorite hymns and/or praise songs, or why they did not like certain hymns and/or praise songs these are the most common answers given. Question 25 asked why certain hymns or praise songs were favorites. The X'ers gave a wider variety of answers such as "they evoked memories of childhood church experiences," "Good theology and good music," and "they have a social message," but the most common answer was, "they touch my heart." Similarly the Boomers answered, "they touch me deep inside." "Memories" and "They speak for me" were also mentioned more than once. The G.I./Silents used the phrase, "They touched my spirit." Hymns and praise songs that were not favorites (Question 26) were so for two dominant reasons: they were either poorly written or difficult to sing. All three groups answered by saying, "The text and the theology are poor" or "bad music and bad theology" as well as "they are difficult to sing."

Fifty-three of the respondents said they liked to sing. In response to Question 28, feelings when singing in worship included "One with God" or "close to God, united, joyful, prayerful, happy, a stirring of the spirit, and passion." The connection of the feelings described in Question 28 to feelings about God in Question 29 included "Unity or Closeness with God." The last two questions in this section, "Does singing help you understand God?" and "Has singing in worship changed your viewpoint about the world?" resulted in answers that included, "I feel God's presence" "God appreciates joy" "Helps my faith" and

while most said that God was not something that *could* be fully understood, singing helped their understanding of God. Many respondents did not think singing had changed their viewpoint of the world, but the one-third that did answer said that they had come to recognize that “not all people are in the same place,” and “God acts in all cultures,” “I realize that all the world’s problems are solvable” “I feel the connections between God and the world,” and “Music changes people and breaks down barriers.”

Most thought that both the music and the words were important (Question 32), and a slight majority thought lyrics to hymns and praise songs could be changed (Question 33). When asked for a hymn title that best described the respondent’s viewpoint of God the X’ers mostly put “other” and listed a variety of hymns that included *Lord of the Dance*, *Amazing Grace*, and *How Great Thou Art*. Boomers usually picked *What a Friend We Have in Jesus* or suggested another hymn such as *Hymn of Promise*, *How Great Thou Art*, and *Amazing Grace* and G.I./Silents overwhelmingly chose *Immortal, Invisible God Only Wise*.

Questions 35-52

Questions 35-52 were designed to help connect the respondent’s thoughts and feelings about music with their particular worldview, theological view and values. Taking my lead from Tubbs Tisdale I created questions that focused on God, humanity, creation, time and church.³⁰ The most common answer for an image of God, by far, was a God who was “lawgiver and forgiving parent,” and

³⁰Tisdale, 80-84.

“God works in human affairs primarily through natural processes.” Three respondents, all Boomers, emphasized that God *does* work through miracles as well. Primary word images of God included “Father” and “Creator.” “Mother” was the least helpful image for God. Other word images included “Savior” and “Light of the World.” Every word image listed in questions 37 and 38 was chosen, and a variety of other word images were added, but these were the most common answers.

When asked what made the most sense to them when talking about humanity, the respondents’ view was “All people are children of God” followed by “All people are fallible and finite, yet they are brought to perfection through the inner workings of the Holy Spirit.” When asked later, in question 41, what was the most important statement 33 responded, “All people are children of God.” Second was “Personal and Spiritual growth” with fifteen responses and third “What a person does with their life” with seven responses. Thirty-two said that creation is something with which we are in harmony, but there was an almost even split between “Creation is here to serve humanity,” and “Humanity is but a part of creation.” The respondents’ view of time was almost evenly split between “time is precious” and “time is relational.” One respondent made the distinction between “precious” and “relational” dependent upon whether her mother was baby-sitting the kids.

Questions about church had very common answers. Most said that thinking of their church brought the thought, “What can we do today that will help us become better tomorrow?” “Other” was the most common answer to the

question “When you hear the word HOPE what images come to mind?” A variety of answers included “kin-dom of God,” “possibilities,” “We’re not alone,” and “acceptance.” The most common metaphor for church was “intimate Community of the Spirit,” followed closely by “Servant of the Servant Lord.” “Herald of Good News” and “Sacrament of Salvation” was chosen by only a few. Most answered that the church was a “Hospital for Sinners.” (Question 48) X’ers were the only group that felt any groups should not be a part of church leadership. Four of the ten who responded thought Gay and Lesbian persons should not, but overall only seven respondents thought that way. For Question 50, X’ers and Boomers agreed that the primary mission focus of their church was “encouraging individuals to be involved in the world.” G.I./Silents thought their church was primarily “calling people to salvation and eternal life.” The statement that best described their church for X’ers was a toss-up between “we are a pillar,” and “we are servants.” Boomers first answer was “we are servants,” followed by “we are a pillar” and “we are crusaders” evenly split. G.I./Silents mostly answered, “we are servants.” The last question also had the clearest answer. Forty-seven described their overall understanding of the church as “No matter how unjust and confusing the world may be, there is hope in communities that are based on love, compassion, and the desire to do what one can to make the world a better place.”

Small Group Interviews and Discussions

Since all of the participants were interested in music, the focus of the interviews and discussions was on questions 16-20 although the issues ranged

from the style of the survey to the questions about God, humanity, creation and the church. In general most thought the survey was helpful for them. One said it helped them through a “sense of self discovery.” Many agreed that the questions asked about the issues of music and worship were questions they had not really thought about. One participant confessed that the survey was “more difficult than I thought it would be.” When asked why she thought that she said that ranking the styles of music, for example, was very difficult. She liked all kinds of music, but it also forced her to ask questions like what the term “sacred music” meant to her. Another participant indicated that he wrestled with answering the appraisal questions with “how I want it to be rather than how we are.”

As we began discussing questions about acceptable music for worship the first distinct differences of opinion emerged. I'll focus on the two extremes using pseudo-identities. Sally was the youngest of the group and listened mostly to contemporary/pop, jazz and the blues and classical music on the radio. But when it came to acceptable music in worship she drew the line. Folk music, jazz and the blues, rock 'n' roll and even some classical music was unacceptable as worship music. Sally put it this way. “Folk and jazz and rock are way too contemporary for worship. They (the music styles) have nothing to do with the church.” But when it came to favorite hymns and praise songs, which included folk and rock musical styles, Sally had favorites in both. “They just have special meaning for me,” she responded. Beyond that response, though, it became difficult for Sally to describe her feelings and thoughts. She saw no connection between the singing and her understanding of God (question 29), her connection

to God (question 30) and any possible changes about her viewpoint of the world (question 31). All she could say that was really important to her was, “Church is a place where no one seems to care whether you can sing or not.” When asked, she thought this response was a very positive one for her, one that indicated acceptance.

Fred was the oldest in the group. He mostly listened to classical music, chamber music, opera and sometimes jazz. But folk, jazz and rock ‘n’ roll were not acceptable for worship. Fred was clear to say that these were only his opinions. “Their style (folk, jazz and rock) and especially their rhythm do not fit with my ideas of what religious music should convey.” When asked what religious music should convey he responded that, “Religious music helps me focus on the religious experience and away from the bad and sordid characteristics of humankind.” These two respondents represent the extreme ends of the survey spectrum. By far the majority of the answers fit a pattern where the *context* in which the music was used was the determining factor. That is to say so long as the music style fit the worship style the music was acceptable. In other words the music needed to “fit” the worship style. One respondent summed it up this way, “If the focus is on worship—praising and honoring God—instead of a cheap entertainment gimmick, almost anything could be used depending on how it fits into the pattern of the service and what the listeners’ response will be.” All agreed that this statement made sense, one adding that “broadening the congregation’s understanding of worship is important, but not when it’s done in ways that are offensive and condescending.”

When we discussed the feelings felt when singing favorite hymns and songs there was a general sense of “emotional quality” that was present. Words and phrases like, “God is tangible,” “joy,” “peaceful and content,” “a sense of completeness,” and “connected to God.” One said, “Singing—choir and congregation singing together—people united toward a shared vision—There’s a sense of joy and hope in being able to share together that gives optimism for our work in the world.” Another said, “Singing helps me theologically.” One of the things I observed during all of the small group discussions was the depth of the emotional response of the participants. For example, when asked about singing in worship people often became very emotional, even crying, when describing their feelings. It was as if the discussion of their feelings was evoking the feeling itself, that while attempting to describe feeling the presence of God, the participant actually began to feel the presence of God. These were very touching and profound moments for me.

Summary

The process of gathering information about the role of music in worship has been the focus of this chapter. We began with recognizing that the debate about whether worship is primarily evangelical or formative raised important questions about music in worship. Is music simply a functional aspect of the evangelical process or is music actively involved in a process of meaning making itself? A survey was developed to help search for answers to these questions. In addition to the survey there were small group interviews and follow up questions.

The function of the survey, its design and implementation, the small group interviews and the follow up questions are at the heart of this project. The purpose of the survey and subsequent small group interviews was to help exegete the respondents. What were the worldviews of the respondents? What did they value? How important was music in worship for them? These and other important questions were guiding me through the design and implementation of the survey. The results have been stimulating and thought provoking, but there is still work left to do. What we have done here is present the results. We have only begun the process of exegesis for our “congregation.”

No matter how carefully one exegetes their “congregation” they still must attempt an interpretation of the results. The fact that symbolic and metaphorical language was an essential part of the survey makes interpretation imperative. With interpretation comes risk, and risk can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand the interpreter can “read” the results in a way that will always produce a desired outcome. On the other hand, the interpreter can use means to interpret that will produce new possibilities for thinking about or “seeing” the results. In the next two chapters we will reflect upon the results of the survey and interview process. Chapter 4 will focus on the results themselves and Chapter 5 will speculate on what the results might mean for understanding the role of music in worship in a postmodern context. The hope is we will be open to the possibilities these results offer.

Chapter 4

Interpreting the Results

“Among the range of moral concepts that the Middle Ages derived from Aristotle, few exercised greater influence Than the doctrine of *habitus* (a term ordinarily translated as ‘habit,’ but more properly meaning ‘state’ or ‘condition’)”³¹

What does this information mean? Can any kinds of conclusions be drawn from these responses? Is there anything we can learn that will help us with the questions about lack of critical reflection and how similar emotional responses derive from hymns with different theologies? In order to answer these questions we need to revisit the question, “What is worship?”

The question, “What is worship?” provided the context for the entire interview/survey process. The interview process could not have occurred if the participants did not understand from the beginning that the questions and discussions centered on the act of Christian worship. As was previously discussed, Christian worship was clearly understood by the participants to be first and foremost an interaction between God and people. We are reminded that this

³¹ Cary J. Nederman, “Nature Ethics, and the Doctrine of ‘Habitus’: Aristotelian Moral Psychology in the Twelfth Century” *Traditio* vol. 45 (1989-90): 87-110, 87.

interaction is the means through which people develop an identity for themselves in relationship to God. The consensus of the survey participants was that God was calling them to form communities that were based on love and compassion serving as examples of how to live in a world that appeared to be mostly un-loving and absent of compassion.

Historian and ethnographer Thomas J. Csordas refers to this process of awareness as an “orientational process” in which one develops a sense of “spiritual and corporal individuality,” or identity. The group of respondents for this project could respond because they had experienced a particular orientation process of self-discovery through which the self had discovered a “person” that is “other.”³² The particular orientation process studied in this instance is Christian worship. The interview/survey revealed a well-formed “identity” for each of the group participants, an identity that was intimately connected to their understanding of God developed through their participation in Christian worship. God was the “other” that was “discovered” through worship. The driving force in the orientational process was music. Throughout conversations about different aspects of worship the group considered important (such as preaching and teaching) none held the same significance as music.

I think this study reveals that music is a symptom of a deeper set of issues surrounding congregational conflicts over the acceptability of music used in worship. For if worship is the orientational process that leads to the discovery of self in relationship to the “other,” and music is a significant aspect in the process,

³² Thomas J. Csordas, *The Sacred Self* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 276-78.

then the real issue appears to be none other than God. Put simply, if we change the music in worship, we seem to “change” who God is, or change who we are in relationship to God. When Fred said earlier that certain music did not fit his ideas about what “religious” music should convey, Fred was saying in effect, “This music does not help me recognize God’s presence.” Fred’s answer to a follow up question about what constituted a “religious experience” was ambiguous, and rightly so. Music in worship seems to be another of those symbolic forms of communication that mediate meaning. In the book *Our Lady of the Exile* Thomas A. Tweed called this the “struggle over the meaning of symbols.”³³

Meaning is mediated—especially in worship—through symbols. These symbols can be words, gestures, rituals, music, objects and so forth. But symbols are relational and contextual in nature. That is to say, symbols derive their meaning out of one’s own experience. What has symbolic meaning for one may have no meaning for another. Certain symbols carry significant communal meaning. A country’s flag, or the cross for Christians can be such symbols. The interview/survey indicated that music carried great symbolic meaning for the participants. In other words music does more than provide a function. The qualities of music in worship were mostly described as emotional qualities: Joy, peacefulness, completeness, connectedness with God as well as those they were singing with. The respondents’ understanding of God, self, creation and

³³ Thomas A. Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997): 10.

church indicated congruence with the statements that they were loved, called to love, were a part of creation, and responsible for the care of creation. (see questions 38-52) What appeared to become problematic was the style of music used in worship that did not fit with one's experience of God through the music in worship. Not all music styles used in a particular worship service will convey meaning to all people.

I see connections between this problem and the questions regarding lack of critical reflection and shared feelings for hymns containing differing theologies. What connects these seemingly unassociated questions is a condition called *habitus*. As described at the beginning of this chapter *habitus* is not simply a 'habit' but a habit that leads to a 'state' or 'condition.' Anthropologist and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu describes it as a process where, "The habitus, the product of history, produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history."³⁴ Habitual practices of any kind eventually become ingrained and, in turn lead to practices which strengthen the significance of the initial practices. The whole process operates under the momentum of its own weight. Bourdieu did not originate the concept of *habitus*. The concept has been part of Western philosophy since the re-discovery of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in the twelfth century. Indeed, the concept of habit in the formation of Christian character was an important notion in much nineteenth-century theology.³⁵ Central to the formation of moral character through habit was the role of emotion. Emotional experience became the

³⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977): 82-85.

³⁵ John Corrigan, "Habits From the Heart" *The Journal of Religion* Volume 75 (1993) 188-204.

foundation for the formation of habits. The connection of emotion to religious revivalism was not accidental.

“Methodist preacher Samuel K. Jennings, writing to his celebrated Georgia colleague Stith Mead in 1805 said, ‘True religion is the exercise and enjoyment of certain affections.’ In the first place, those affections led to a rejection of bad habits.”³⁶

The connection of emotion to religious experience can also be observed through the interaction of the small groups that entered into moments of vulnerability and personal sharing.

But the essential understanding of developing these habits is that the person knowingly and intentionally practices those habits, and the danger is that the habit becomes so ingrained that the person “forgets” why they are practicing the habit. This would offer an explanation as to why critical reflection is missing in many of the small group interviews we conducted, or explain why they did not know why they believed or felt what they did. It would also explain how music with different theologies could produce the same emotional responses from the participants. The latter is an example of how emotion drives the formation of the habit. In this case the person is “blind” to the musical vehicle that conveys the emotional response that is connected to a particular theology contained in the hymn. In the former is an example of how a person can “know” why a musical style is acceptable for worship but have difficulty articulating their reasons. Further, these are issues experienced both individually and collectively.

Music represents the “system of dispositions” as Bourdieu calls them, and this “musical habitus” falls along class (Bourdieu’s term), or in this particular

³⁶ Ibid, 198.

case, generational and congregational lines. In other words, music conveys meaning historically, and different generations' or congregations' (classes) experiences give shape to different meanings. What has significant meaning musically for one group can have little or no meaning for another. Church congregations contain within them the potential for several generations each with their own particular interpretation or habitus, and music is the means by which that understanding of reality is conveyed. If one changes the music, one might be changing someone else's reality. Recall that one aspect of postmodernism is especially concerned with the effects of habitus because it can perpetuate the concept of "sameness" over against "otherness."

The impact of habitus on the struggle over the meaning of symbols became clear in one of the small group interviews. The group carried on a lengthy discussion over the possibility of changing words in hymns or praise songs (question 33). The example discussed was the line in the hymn *Amazing Grace* "that saved a wretch like me." Changing the line to "saved and set me free," which is actually used as a change in some versions of the hymn, was unacceptable for one of the participants. When asked, "Why?" the participant had a difficult time articulating his reasons. Eventually, the consensus answer was the hymn should be left the way the author wrote it, citing the fact that the author of "Amazing Grace" was a slaveholder who had repented. However, as we continued the discussion on the issue of changing the lyrics, a more critically reflective process, a theological reflection, began to occur. What eventually became the focus was the issue of how one perceived humanity in relationship

with God. Was humanity essentially “wretched” or something else? Once that theological issue emerged, the discussion became more animated. A deep theological sharing began to take place. More of the participants were then able to enter into the discussion. Whereas in the beginning of the discussion only a few had strong feelings about the lyrics of the song, when the theological issue over the essence of humanity became the focus, everyone had a thought. The historical context of the hymn was still important, but how one perceived what was really real about humanity became more important.

Another significant change took place as well. The initial tension over the issue of changing lyrics in hymns had been replaced by a more cooperative agreement to disagree. As participants began to reflect theologically there was a mutual response from them that caused them to listen to the thoughts each had to share. As I observed this interaction it became evident to me that deep theological reflection in this particular instance looked and sounded more like personal story sharing. Eventually the participants agreed to disagree, but from a theological point, and the tension within the group was reduced.

This event seems to validate Salier’s statement “first worship, then reflect.” What we observed from this small group discussion was the initial lack of critical reflection active in worship practice, and more of a reliance on “applying already formulated theories or doctrines to the ‘practices’ of prayer.”³⁷ The person knew he did not want the word in the hymn changed, but could not give a clear answer why, and this led to tension. Rather than reflect critically on the question of

³⁷ Saliers, 16.

changing lyrics in the music, he was relying on an assumption that the text of the music must remain unchanged in order to protect the integrity of the music.

When a critically reflective process occurred—in this small group it was centered in personal story sharing—the tension lessened and theological considerations were made concerning the issue of lyric changes. But why was there a lack of critical reflection in the first place?

A similar experience occurred when asking the participants about which hymn or praise song best described how they thought about God (question 34). The hymn or praise song chosen by the different generational groups conveyed a particular theological notion of God. For example, the G.I./Silents overwhelmingly chose “Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise” while the Boomers chose “What A Friend We Have in Jesus” and the X’ers choices ranged from very traditional (“Amazing Grace” and “How Great Thou Art”) to the more recent (“Lord of the Dance”). Interestingly each generation’s responses to the question why these hymns were favorites was virtually the same—“They touched my spirit.” Why do hymns with different images of God—we might say different theologies—produce virtually the same emotional response among the different groups?

Another significant discovery from this reflection on the results of the survey was the similarities of answers given by the X’ers and the G.I./Silents, especially in the area of met needs both socially and spiritually. X’ers and G.I./Silents were also more resistant than the Boomers to using any and all styles of music in worship. But all three groups were united in their thoughts about

God, creation, humanity and the church, (questions 38-55). We wonder whether the conflicts over the kinds of music used in worship are revealed here as the tension that exists in the postmodern concern over “sameness” and “otherness.”³⁸ The survey results did reveal a discernable difference in certain areas of answers between the Boomers and the other two groups. Most notably the differences emerged through the questions focusing on what music would be considered acceptable for worship, and whether music considered unacceptable within regular worship would be acceptable outside regular worship (questions 19 and 20).

It has become evident to me that the one thing clear about worship and the music performed in worship is: There is no one way to worship, or one way to perform music in worship. It is clear that a criterion for selecting music for worship was applied by the participants in both the survey and the small group interviews, and equally clear these criteria were not based on theological reflection. The confusion and conflict that arises over music styles in worship seems to stem from a lack of critical reflection upon the worship act. In other words, participants typically made their first response to the so-called appraisal questions in the survey out of personal preferences based upon pre-formulated theories and doctrines rather than from a process of critical reflection. Once the process of critical reflection was used in small group discussions, the result was

³⁸ The tendency in modernist thinking to seek absolute and universal answers to questions of meaning can lead to the desire for “sameness,” that is, the desire for uniformity, which confirms the universal. Postmodern suspicion of absolute and universal answers focuses instead upon the “otherness” of things, that is focuses upon the diversity and pluralistic nature of things.

a lessening of the tensions. There was still disagreement to be sure, but the disagreement was recognized as an integral aspect of the process.

There is another aspect of the role of music in worship that became evident in the survey responses. The central question "What makes music the focus of much of the conflict in worship within congregations?" was the theme contained in questions 16-34. One word, used by one of the respondents, sums up for me the critical relationship of music to worship. The word is "vulnerability." Following is a listing of the descriptive words used by the respondents when describing the effect of singing in worship.

Transcendence, "Out of Body," a "worship feeling," being "pulled" like falling in love, connected to God, connected to others, a sense of the Spirit, "touched in my heart," united, joyful, prayerful, engaged, "express what I cannot otherwise say," and as one respondent summed up, "I feel totally vulnerable."

These words, descriptive as they are, reveal deep personal feelings but they do not describe what is happening. How does a person convey the experience of having a sense of transcendence, or of being "out of body?" If worship really is our response to God's revelation, if God really has revealed Godself to humankind through Jesus Christ, if the Spirit really does engage us in life-transforming ways, then how do we find words that can adequately express how we feel about the experience?

Joseph Gelineau, in his book *The Liturgy Today and Tomorrow* referred to the experience of worship as that of discovering a foreign country in which the language and customs are very strange to us.³⁹ Worship can be a very strange

³⁹ Joseph Gelineau, *The Liturgy Today and Tomorrow* trans. Dinah Livingstone (New York: Paulist Press, 1978): 98-99.

land indeed. But it seems the language and customs of that land are things we know. Perhaps we have forgotten them along the way. Is our vulnerability the means for remembering? The participants' use of the word vulnerable is worth reflection. The small group discussion over certain lyrics in the hymn *Amazing Grace* led eventually to a theological reflection shared through personal stories. During that sharing the small group became vulnerable with each other. When talking about what music did to them while singing in worship, another small group experienced intense emotional responses such as crying. Perhaps the dynamic of meaning making in music is experienced through feelings of vulnerability.

I want to make one final observation. The process of conflict resolution over the issue of what music is acceptable for worship is not going to be simple. I think we theologians and worship practitioners must seek to understand more clearly the work of ethnographers, historians and social theorists if progress toward resolving conflicts in worship is to be made. What I have experienced through this process is the awareness of the "person in the pew" and the valuable contributions they have made to this study. We began this project because of the observation and experience of conflict in congregations over the issue of acceptable music for worship. It has become clear that these conflicts are a result of the various theologies of worship and their subsequent worship styles that are brought by the many, varied sub-cultures into the larger Christian community, and the need to lift up their particular worship voice. This is another example of the effects produced by the desire for "sameness."

We designed and implemented a survey that could engage people in a process of critical reflection on the role of music sung in worship. The survey was given to over 130 United Methodists from all areas of the United States. The results, and the small group discussions that followed helped to reveal a variety of thoughts and feelings about worship and the music sung in worship. A definition for Christian worship was sought, and it was discovered that there are many ways to define Christian worship, but all definitions are supported by a fundamental dynamic interaction of revelation and response, to which is added a process of reflection that produces clarity regarding one's finite understanding of God. This process is always contextual.

It became evident that the process through which we might engage the conflicts over worship styles and music styles is to worship first and then reflect. We do not worship in a vacuum. The idea that people worship first means that the first human response to the divine is just that, a response. People do not think things about God and then respond to what they have thought. No, first people experience God, then respond to that experience and then reflect upon the whole interactive process, giving it clarity and new meaning. The theological doctrines and principles of worship produced within Christian tradition are centered in the act of giving clear, understandable language to what we have already experienced and expressed in worship. What has become problematic—and was experienced through the small group discussions—is that, over time, extant doctrines and formulas regarding worship practices have taken the place of this reflective process. We have been left with theologies of worship as

doctrine, or more accurately *doctrines* rather than awareness about our human response to the divine presence in our lives that is both reflective and critically thoughtful.

The result of a doctrinal emphasis absent from critical reflection is significant. Thinking of the doctrines and principles as theology not only has an impact upon the conflicts over acceptable music for worship, but on all areas where there are conflicts over worship. By encouraging a process of reflecting upon worship theologically allows for an openness and vitality in worship. An illustration of how a doctrinal emphasis in worship can prevent meaningful worship can be drawn from a trip Pope John Paul II made to Africa some years ago.

The Roman Catholic leadership in Africa was eager to show the depth and strength of the faithful in their care. With great anticipation they planned a worship service that would capture this depth and strength. The problem, as it turned out was with the difference between the Vatican's understanding of authentic worship and the planners understanding of worship. The worship service planners intended to use the bread of their culture for the Eucharistic celebration, bread that was made from the staple food of their people: bananas. The Vatican oversight team would have nothing to do with this banana bread, citing that only bread made from grains of wheat would do. In this case the Vatican's theological doctrine about worship over-ruled the worship theology being practiced in that part of Africa. The resulting worship service lacked authenticity and meaning for the Africans.

Another example of this lack of authenticity and meaning comes from those who have raised their voices in support of a feminist perspective in worship. Despite all efforts to include women equally in leadership roles within Christianity, women are still left with the reality that many of their worship needs are not being met. Despite the efforts to recognize and affirm feminist styles of worship, these styles are often seen as secondary to authentic worship. And feminist issues are present on all sides of the discussions about Christian worship. For example, even though many evangelical churches are spearheading the contemporary worship movement, and are growing in worship attendance at rapid rates, there has been resistance to encouraging women's leadership roles. In researching for this paper, I found very few examples of women's writings about contemporary worship and those found were on subjects such as music, worship planning and drama—very few were found in subjects such as preaching, pastoring and theologizing. I think that as long as there is little or no voice for the feminist perspective in the discussions about worship there will be little or no movement toward a worship style based upon what I would call contextually appropriate worship.

A further critique of the emphasis on worship doctrine over reflective process is the plethora of works emphasizing an either/or choice when it comes to worship style. For some time the choices were to have either a "traditional" worship service or a "contemporary" worship service. The introduction of the concept of "blended" worship acknowledged this dichotomy but was still bounded within modernistic, either/or thinking. That is, the worship style was often

developed more from an initial focus on the understood and accepted formulas and doctrines rather than through critical reflection. The result of this research is perhaps offering an alternative, a third way of worshipping. This new way of worshipping might be best defined as contextually appropriate worship. Interestingly the music of a contextually appropriate style of worship is very eclectic. Chant, hymns, contemporary, jazz—all kinds of music are embraced. The emphasis of worship is not to uphold doctrinal principles as static and unchanging, but to encounter the living God in ways that are potentially transforming for all who participate in ways that are contextually appropriate.

Summary

We began this chapter by asking whether or not any conclusions might be drawn from the survey/interview information. What did the survey have to say about worship and the relationship of music to the act of worship? Earlier we noted that worship was a dynamic of revelation/response/critical reflection set within historical and contextual boundaries. Critical theological reflection is a process often absent in discussions about worship styles and music styles. The survey and subsequent interviews revealed the meaning-making role of music in worship, that music did more than provide a function within the worship action. Meaning making is an essential aspect of forming identity, both individual and communal.

The role of *habitus* is important for understanding the meaning making of music in worship, and helps us answer the question why music is a flashpoint for conflicts in congregations over music styles used in worship. The results of the

survey and small group discussion reveal that there is a need for more critical reflection by the participants in worship rather than simply relying upon—through habit—already formulated doctrines and principles. The results of critical reflection can deep personal sharing and a sense of what the participants called vulnerability, but the process of critical reflection also led to greater awareness of self in relation to the other, and tension was lessened. The need for critical reflection has been expressed especially through the two groups that seem to have a lesser voice in the overall process of defining worship, X'ers and G.I./Silents. The postmodern suspicion of the modernist desire for “sameness” over against “otherness” is reflected in the tension and conflicts over music styles used in worship, and the need to lift up every voice when singing in worship.

Chapter 5

Where Do We Go From Here?

“What must be present for there to be a worship service? A sacred place, the Gospel of hope and grace, the crucified Christ. Each of those must touch the heart of the worshiper, or there is no worship. Even if all the externals are there.” --participant Russ Locke

In order to envision where we might go from here it will be important to reflect upon where we have come from. We began this discussion with the problem of tension and conflict in worship in which music was the flashpoint. The thesis of this project has been that these tensions and conflicts can best be understood through a process of reflection on the action of worship in general, and the role of music within that process in particular. To be included in this critical reflection was the postmodern critique of modernity. The hope was that through reflection and description, an understanding—especially of the meaning-making aspect of music in worship—would produce a new way to talk about and engage in a worship dialog.

Chapter 2 began by focusing on questions about worship, what it is, what it does and why we do it. It became evident that current literature on the subject of worship categorized worship into two basic styles, traditional and contemporary. It was noted that the debate over the two styles of worship centered on the purpose of worship. Is worship first a formational experience or is it primarily evangelical. That is to say is worship an event where the people

are formed as the “people of God” or is worship a place where people are invited to say “yes” to God’s invitation to become a person of God? A reflection on the postmodern critique of modernity offered a possible alternative to the current discussion between traditional and contemporary worship. Rather than focusing solely on the literature a decision was made to design a survey and interview process that would invite the “people in the pews” into the discussion.

Chapter 3 outlined the process for the design and implementation of the survey and interviews, which were done in small groups. The results of the survey indicated the significance of music in worship for those who responded. Interestingly people could identify what they thought were appropriate music styles for worship but could not readily articulate why. Similarly the groups, when identified by generation, named hymns and songs that conveyed different images of God but described the feelings associated with those hymns and songs in the same descriptive language. That is to say the feelings were the same but the source of the feelings (image of God) was different, and we thought about why that was so.

Thinking about why the results were the way they were was the task of Chapter 4. The methodology was a kind of exegesis much like the work a person would do to exegete a congregation. This reflection raised questions. What was the role of meaning making in the music of worship? Did music contribute to the identity of persons and whole congregations? The experience of the survey and small group discussion demonstrated the need for more critical reflection about worship rather than reliance upon previously formulated

doctrines and principles. The results of the process of critical reflection used in the small group discussions led to deep personal sharing and a feeling that was summed up by the word “vulnerability.” The process of critical reflection also led to greater awareness of self in relation to the other, and tension over issues about music styles and worship styles was lessened. This process for critical reflection is not oriented toward content, but focuses instead upon worship that is appropriate for the particular context. The context is not limited to the group itself. By first understanding the dynamic of revelation/response/reflection as outlined in Chapter 2, we are able to engage in a process that invites even the whole world into the context. It becomes a process of reflection that asks the question, “How do we do something that is not only for our own good but also for the good of the whole world?” The process moves us from “either/or” language to “both/and” language.

In summary it might be said that we learned it is more important to engage in a process of designing contextually appropriate worship. We begin with the question, “Where are we in relation to God, and the whole world, right now?” rather than with the question, “What do the doctrines and practices of worship say we should be doing?” Worship that is contextually appropriate invites further critical reflection as a result of the experience, which can lead to new images and ideas about who God is, and who we are in relation to God. And the process goes on. That would be engaging worship indeed! But does that mean we must shed concepts such as traditional worship, contemporary worship and blended worship? To use the language of my postmodern daughter, “whatever!” What a

contextually appropriate worship style asks us to think about is shedding concepts that work only in an either/or framework. In that sense contextually appropriate worship is traditional and contemporary at the same time. When asked follow up questions to the survey the participants gave some answers that reflected doctrinal practice, but they also told several stories. In that vein, I can share a story that might help understand the notion of worship that is both traditional and contemporary.

One of the focuses of my seminary training was pastoral care. I have many books in my library that cover pastoral care issues. I have one very thick book called *The Dictionary of Pastoral Care*, which, as the name implies, covers all the issues of pastoral care. On one occasion I visited a parishioner in the hospital and realized that the person was dying and had perhaps only hours to live. I thought about all I had learned and what I could do for that person, the prayers I could say and so on; I even thought about *The Dictionary of Pastoral Care*, and what it might have to say. Eventually what I finally did was sit with that person and hold their hand without saying much at all. Holding their hand felt like the most significant thing I could do at that time. That did not mean all of my seminary training was useless. To the contrary I was able to engage in a reflective process that *included* what I had learned that ultimately allowed me to simply reach out and hold a hand. This personal experience led to further reflection that has helped re-shape, even deepen, my understanding of pastoral care.

The literature on worship focusing on the differences between traditional and contemporary worship styles often agree on certain non-negotiable elements in worship but is music one of those elements? If we look closely at Russ Locke's answer to the question found at the beginning of this chapter we find nothing mentioned about music. Is the conflict really about music as ritual or practice—or is it something else? What makes a place sacred? What ingredients are present in a Gospel of hope and grace? The purpose here has not been to describe a set of rituals and doctrines for a particular worship style. The purpose here has been to share stories of people and congregations that have engaged in what I have been calling contextually appropriate worship, which is based upon a process first, rather than a doctrine or principle. Here are three such stories.

Grace Church

Grace church recently celebrated its 100th birthday as a congregation. It has a proud history and at its peak during the years immediately following World War II had a membership of over 2000. By the decade of the sixties the community surrounding Grace church was changing from a predominantly Anglo population to African-American. By the decade of the nineties the community had actually changed again, from African-American to Hispanic. Grace church struggled along during these times and membership dwindled to less than 200. The congregation was also aging. Their leadership's concerns were focused on finding ways to attract people from the community into their church. Worship was seen as the entry-point but the church leadership did not know how to revitalize

worship. The demographics of the surrounding community revealed a younger, more ethnically diverse population than that of the church membership. This posed multiple issues. Both the ethnic cultures and the generational cultures would impact the changes needed in worship. Grace church was at a loss. They had been worshipping their way for almost fifty years! Unfortunately, when the leadership began talking about making changes in worship many people expressed concerns and even fears that the church would be taken over by people who would have little or no respect for church tradition and traditional church music. The tension between wanting to make changes that would attract new members and the concerns about church traditions being lost led to conflict between the leaders and the members. The primary battleground was the “new” music that was being proposed for worship. Nevertheless, the leaders of Grace church began a process for resolving the conflict.

The first step Grace church took toward addressing the conflict over music in worship was to ask why they sang the songs they did in worship. This process was hard work. The reason was the tendency to stay on the surface of the question. That is to say, too often the response to the question “Why?” was “Because that’s the way we’ve always done it!” Digging deeper into the story can often reveal meanings for things that have been long forgotten. Rather than limiting the traditional hymns of this congregation, the leadership decided to sing the traditional hymns even more, but with time built in to talk about the hymns and why they had so much meaning for the members. People wrote stories about their favorite hymns that were printed in the church bulletin and the

newsletter. The hymns and their personal stories were made a part of the worship services.

The second step Grace church took was to ask the question, "Why not?" Why not sing new hymns? Why not sing new songs of praise? Why not introduce new styles of music into worship? These questions were asked at women's group meetings, men's group meetings, choir practice, worship committee meetings and staff meetings. People were allowed to share their thoughts about music in worship and to debate the merits of different styles of music. Most important to this part of the process, members were invited to hear from people who did not share their traditional views about worship. (In this case these non-members were invited to come to group meetings and talk with the members) The leadership of the congregation, including the pastors, then initiated a series of group discussions about the concept of worship as theology.

The third step Grace church took was to take their new ideas and try new ways of worshipping. Music groups from other churches were invited to lead the music of worship. New songs were introduced and taught to the congregation. A Sunday evening "Hymn Sing" was held, but the hymns were new songs instead. For each worship event, or new song event there was a follow-up with groups of members who then talked about their experiences and especially their feelings about God. Through these times of sharing the members began to develop a more positive attitude about new styles of music in worship. In fact, some even began to talk about the "ministry" of singing new non-traditional songs in worship

as a kind of outreach to the community. Gradually the focus became the act of worship.

This process took place over a period of several months. By the end of that time Grace church had made significant changes in its worship. There was a blending⁴⁰ of different music styles that reflected the results of their discussions, song events and interaction with guest music groups. But it did not stop there. What had really taken place was the adoption of an ongoing process for worshipping and reflecting. The congregation, through its worship committee, continually asked the question “Why?” What Grace church had actually done was start asking the question, “Where is God?” in the worship.

All Church Cultural Gatherings at Lemon Groves Church

Lemon Tree UMC began as a single congregation but today comprises three separate UM congregations, Euro-American, Samoan-American and Korean-American. Despite the fact that these three congregations share the same church facilities there were few opportunities to become acquainted with each other. The church was assigned a seminary intern who was given the task of planning an all-church gathering that would involve people of all ages from all three congregations. The intern’s name is Molly, and she is a “GenXer.”

Molly’s first decision was to create a planning group of people from all three congregations. None of the pastors were on the planning team. According to Molly, “I wanted to decrease the already existing power dynamics present when the pastors are involved in planning church events. Usually they made the decisions, and it was clear to me they (the pastors) did not want that to happen in

⁴⁰ This is not to be confused with the concept of “blended” worship whose stated intent is to take elements of traditional and contemporary worship styles and blend them into a third style. Blending in this example involved making musical decisions about music for worship based upon the context of the worship and not on a desire to obtain a balance between traditional and contemporary.

this instance.” Once the planning team was gathered they decided on goals, which were:

- To learn more about each other culturally and personally
- To learn more about interacting with people different from ourselves
- To have fun!
- To worship together
- To involve people of all ages, backgrounds, congregations

The basic plan became an event that would be held on three consecutive Monday evenings and took place during Lent in April, 2000. The evenings had three parts, Sharing, Worship and an Activity. The sharing included snacks or desserts. The worship was left open for the planners to decide and the activity was to be something that would help the three congregations interact with each other. Each Monday evening the three congregations would be responsible for one of the parts. The first Monday the Euro congregation provided the sharing, the Korean congregation provided the activity and the Samoan congregation led the worship. Molly offers these reflections on the event.

“It felt to me like the program belonged to the whole church, and not to any particular congregation. I think this was possible partly because the openness of the plan. Because the form of the program was left loose, each part was adaptable to whoever was leading and planning it.

Another part of the success was tied to the fact that we did active, fun things. Worship was wonderful because, after all, we are a *church*. Sharing our Christian unity, and learning something of the different ways we express that common faith, is a positive experience. I found the songs, especially, to be very meaningful.”

The worship each week was led by the congregation in charge in its own particular context for worship. That is, there was no blending—everyone participated in the worship of the other’s culture. The result, despite the

difficulties of language and understanding was powerfully unifying. As Molly said, people recognized that they *were* church.

The Friendship Gate

Each year for over thirty years of its existence, Laguna UMC held an annual worship service with the Jewish Temple congregation that shared the parking lot with them. The service had a thanksgiving theme and focused on a gate that had been erected near the entrance to the parking lot. An inscription on the gate read in both English and Hebrew, "Take off your shoes, you are standing on holy ground." This year the service was to be held at Laguna UMC and what made the service unique was the fact that Laguna UMC now shared its facilities with two Korean UM congregations, one Korean speaking and one English speaking. It was decided to include all four congregations in the service.

The worship service had music typically sung in each of the congregations and was led respectively by the Cantor from the Temple, two choirs, one Euro and one Korean and a Praise Group. Despite the inability by all present to understand everything that was spoken or sung, the service was prayerful and inspirational. Six months later the congregations all talk about ways to worship together, and have planned more worship events throughout the year.

Conclusion

Each of these stories is representative of what might be called a postmodern approach to worship. In the story of Grace Church the model for addressing their problem with worship over music styles in worship began with "naming" the conflict. Instead of being critical it was important to begin with a

critique. The next step was to begin asking questions about what happens in worship and why things are done the way they are. Third, they began asking about alternatives to what was already being done and entered into a process of experimenting in worship. Accompanying this part of the process was a time for evaluation. Finally there was an assimilation of the things that were meaningful into worship, and the elimination of things that were no longer meaningful.

At Lemon Tree church a decision was made to allow freedom in planning worship involving diverse cultures. The focus shifted from an effort to produce sameness, but, rather, emphasize the value of “other.” The result was worship that engaged all of the participants meaningfully. Laguna UMC attempted the same kind of process when planning worship, but the final design was more of a blending of the styles of the cultures, and religions, represented.

The thesis of this project was that through a process of reflection on the action of worship—and the music used in worship—a way for easing the tensions that arise over worship styles and music styles might be discovered. The impact of postmodernism upon worship styles has contributed to a better understanding of such a process—a process that is critically reflective, and oriented toward designing worship that is contextually appropriate. These three stories in three different contexts have each offered, in their own way, to attempt an answer to the questions “What is worship?” “What do we do in worship?” and “Why worship?”

The title of this project offers a clue to the move from a modernist to postmodernist understanding of what it means to “Lift Every Voice and Sing!”

Postmodernism embraces the particularity and diversity of the many voices that want to sing in worship. Within the process of creating contextually appropriate worship the possibilities can seem endless, and yet within all of this diversity there emerges a unity. This unity can best be expressed through the participants in this project who summed it up best when they said, "It touches my heart."

Implications for Future Work and Reflection

This project identified two styles of worship and their purposes, but also, on several occasions raised the question of whether there was a worship style that could be called "postmodern." As was pointed out earlier, the discussion within the current literature on worship regarding the conflicts over worship styles and music styles has so far been oriented toward an either/or solution primarily because of its focus on the "traditional" versus "contemporary" worship styles. The most common options have been either we maintain the differences between traditional and contemporary worship styles, or we combine the two in some fashion in order to produce a "blended" style. I believe that there are more than two styles of worship, more than what we call traditional and contemporary worship. I also believe there is a viable alternative to these styles that is not just a blended style of worship, but one we might call a postmodern style of worship.

Neither the traditional nor the contemporary styles of worship fully account for the impact of postmodernism. Most discussions about worship usually make distinctions between "traditional" and "contemporary" worship, but I think these distinctions still operate within the context of modernism. Products of the institutional church, and the influence of the institutional church, which is still

mostly Western and European and modern, these styles of worship rely on already formulated worship doctrines and practices, often lacking the process for creating contextually appropriate worship. Even though most proponents of the contemporary worship style would argue that contemporary worship is indeed contextual, I would counter argue that the contemporary style as defined by these proponents fits a very narrow context, and that context is affluent Euro-American Baby-boomers. Where and in what ways are all the other voices allowed to sing out in such a contemporary worship?

Postmodern styles of worship have yet to be fully explored and discussed. Currently, the most active discussions and explorations about postmodern worship are taking place among feminist and womanist scholars as well as those who have grown up within postmodernism—those who have been labeled Generation 'X' and Millennials. From these postmodern discussions a new style of worship may be identifiable.

I would describe the postmodern style of worship as multivalent and pluriform. Postmodern worship can take many shapes and forms but it is grounded in what I have called a process of creating contextually appropriate worship. Contained within this process are certain key elements that could be termed elements of a postmodern worship style. I would describe these elements of a postmodern worship style as *interpretive, deconstructive, relational, practical and theological*. When designing contextually appropriate worship these elements can be made manifest through actions that include respect for the dignity of creation, an emphasis on both personal and communal

stewardship, a sense of solidarity with all of creation, community, the need for playfulness, a well formed understanding and grounding in Christian history and tradition, the embrace of local culture in all of its diversity, a process for ongoing critical reflection, and even a detachment from materialism.

Postmodern worship is interpretive. Postmodernism rejects the notion that pure knowledge is obtainable. All knowledge is contextual. For example, what Christians “know” about God is transmitted through the event of Jesus Christ. But what do we know about that event itself? To help guide us we have scripture, other early Christian writings, works of theologians, church doctrines, personal witnesses and so on. Religious scholars have sought an answer to that question for three hundred years and yet, even now, what can be said about the historical Jesus was most eloquently summed up by Albert Schweitzer in his book *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* when he said, “He comes to us as One unknown...” While modernity may be uncomfortable with that notion—Schweitzer’s book shook the academic foundations when it was published—postmoderns accept and even embrace the unknowable qualities—what church tradition has called the “mysteries”—of Jesus Christ. In response, postmodern worship seeks to understand Gospel claims in its own context. That is to say postmodern worship engages in the twofold interpretive interaction of understanding the original Gospel context and its relationship to the context of the people hearing that Gospel claim today. The interpretive process takes place in what Ronald J. Allen calls in his article *Preaching and Postmodernism*⁴¹

⁴¹ Ronald J. Allen, “*Preaching and Postmodernism*” *Interpretation* (January 2001): 34.

“conversation.” I would simply say that postmodern worship is interpretive through “conversation,” a conversation that includes *all* who desire to participate in worship.

Postmodern worship is deconstructive. Ronald Allen states that, “Deconstruction names the ambiguities, consequences, inconsistencies and contradictions inherent in our world constructions.”⁴² Postmodern worship names these ambiguities, consequences, inconsistencies and contradictions through the interpretive interaction with the Gospel and its claims. Deconstruction de-idolizes the Bible and our religious notions of absolute truth, forcing us to rethink what the Gospel says to us today.

Postmodern worship is relational. We live in relationship between our self and others. “Other” is different to “self,” is not the “same.” Postmodern Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas criticizes Western modernity’s attempt to “reduce the Other to the Same.”⁴³ Inclusiveness often translates into homogeneity rather than a recognition and acceptance of particularity. Postmodern worship embraces particularity by recognizing the differences of Other and Same and opens up the possibility that we might recognize the One who is ineffably *Other*.

Postmodern worship is practical. That is to say postmodern worship is not concerned with conventional wisdom in liturgical practice. Postmodern worship is concerned with what works in the context with which it works. This practical approach is not done, however, at the expense of conventional wisdom or

⁴² Ibid, 38.

⁴³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969): 43.

liturgical practice. To the contrary, a critique of a liturgical practice would respect the convictions of said practice. For example, questioning the value of traditional hymns in worship would include within its criticism recognizing the value of those hymns in their own context.

And finally, postmodern worship is theological. Theological reflection emerges out of the worship action and is not contingent upon already formulated doctrines. This does not mean existent doctrines are ignored, but that they are critically evaluated using a process of worship design and practice followed by critical reflection that emerges out of the elements of postmodern worship described above. And the process is more important than the product.

One way of describing the *goal* of a postmodern worship style is what Susanne Johnson calls in her book, *Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom* a move toward Christian spiritual renewal, or what Tom Beaudoin calls “learning to live a publicly Christian life.” The principles of postmodern worship described above are not really new. They attempt to recover aspects of Christian worship that have been lost as a result of the impact of modernity. In that sense, Johnson talks about “renewal of” rather than a “new” spirituality. Johnson writes,

“Renewal of spirituality has always at heart been a call to renewed Christianity!...Christian spiritual formation has to do with finding out through and with the help of the faith community

- How to be Christian in this time, in this place;
- How to recognize and confess our self-deception;
- How to walk according to the Spirit;
- How to recognize where we are effusing Christian Story and choosing instead the stories of culture and civil religion;
- How to acquire Christian character;

- How to learn skills required by Christian Story, such as praying, meditating, repenting, loving, welcoming the stranger;
- How to actualize our Christian vocation over the course of a lifetime.”⁴⁴

Johnson outlines a process that includes critical reflection, practical application, recognition of relationships and an affirmation of diversity and particularity that compliments the principles of postmodern worship.

The scope and limits of this project do not realistically allow for further work in this area. Future work, however, might include a deeper discussion and reflection on the process of critical reflection as it relates to the design of worship. A second focus might be upon the notion of a postmodern worship style, what are its implications for worship in general, and how we might continue to develop that worship style in all of its diversity and particularity. The process goes on.

⁴⁴ Susanne Johnson, *Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989): 11.

Appendix

Interview/Survey

These questions, and any interviews in which you participate are part of a Doctor of Ministry project by Rev. Ron Griffen. The study's purpose is to examine the experience of singing in worship, and the meaning(s) derived from doing so. No one will have access to your answers except Rev. Griffen, and he will be using them only to reflect on the overall focus of meaning making with music in worship. This interview will be done with respect to your identity, and the confidential nature of your responses. Giving your name will not be required or asked for in this interview. Answers you give in this interview may be used as a part of the final presentation, or publication of Rev. Griffen.

If you have any questions, you may contact Rev. Griffen at:

Rev. Ronald P. Griffen
22364 Estallens
Mission Viejo, CA 92692
e-mail: RONGRIFFEN@msn.com

or you may contact Dr. Kathy Black at:

Claremont School of Theology
1325 N. College Ave.
Claremont, CA 91711.
800.626.7821

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview.

You And Your Church

Today's Date: _____

1. Male _____ Female _____
2. Age _____
3. Church Affiliation _____
4. Do you attend this church
 - a. regularly
 - b. often, but not every week
 - c. seasonally(Christmas, Easter, etc)
5. What kind of worship service do you like to attend regularly? (please circle all that apply)
 - a. Traditional
 - b. Contemporary
 - c. Evenings
 - d. A day other than Sunday
 - e. It doesn't really matter
6. In what year did you start attending this church? _____
7. How much are you able to participate in church activities? (e.g., committees, Bible Studies, choirs, social groups, service groups)?
 - a. Regularly
 - b. Often, but not on a regular basis
 - c. Not often, if at all
8. In general, how well does this church meet:
(circle one number beside each statement, 1 being "completely"
and 4 being "not at all")

Your social needs	1	2	3	4
Your spiritual needs	1	2	3	4

9. People go to church for different reasons. From the list below, please circle the most important reason you attend worship at your church. Make one choice only.

- a. Mainly, it's a habit
 - b. I want to please or satisfy someone close to me (e.g., spouse or parent)
 - c. I want to set an example for my children
 - d. I enjoy being with other persons in our church (social)
 - e. I enjoy taking part in the worship service itself (spiritual)
 - f. I enjoy the feeling of meditating and communicating with God.
 - g. I feel the need to hear God's work
 - h. I feel a need to receive the sacrament of communion (the Lord's Supper, Eucharist)
 - i. Other (indicate reason in the space)
-
-

10. How would you rate the quality of the worship services at your church?
(circle one for each letter)

Key: 1=Usually of high quality
 2=Usually satisfactory
 3=Could be improved
 4=Usually unsatisfactory

- | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| a. Music | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| b. Scripture readings | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| c. Sermon | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| d. Congregational Singing | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| e. Prayers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| f. Ritual(s) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

11. Which of the following best describes why you continue to attend this church?
(With the understanding that all of these are factors in why you attend, please circle the top three reasons only)

- a. It's my church.
- b. Quality of friendliness and/or concern among church members.
- c. The opportunities for becoming actively involved in the church.
- d. The quality of pastoral care and concern given by the staff.
- e. The atmosphere of the church building itself.
- f. The quality of preaching.
- g. The music program
- h. The opportunity for community service.
- i. The style of worship that is typical of the church.

- j. The fact that many of my friends/relatives belong to this church.
- k. The quality of religious education.
- l. The youth ministry.
- m. Other reasons (please write reasons in this space)

12. How would you relate the worship in this church to your ongoing faith experience?

- a. Very important
- b. Somewhat important
- c. Not very important
- d. Of no importance

13. Do you consider yourself a musician? Yes ____ No ____

14. Do you participate in the music program(s) at your church? Yes ____ No ____

15. Do you read music? Yes ____ No ____

16. How often do you listen to music on the radio?

Number of hours/week ____

Principal radio stations ____

17. The world is filled with all kinds of music. Arrange the following list of "music styles" in order of your preference by numbering them 1-10.

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| ____ Folk Music | ____ Rock 'n' Roll |
| ____ Jazz and the blues | ____ Classical/symphonic |
| ____ Opera | ____ Musical comedies |
| ____ Sacred music | ____ Gospel music |
| ____ Chamber music | |
| ____ Other: _____ | |

18. Are there any styles or kinds of music that you feel are not acceptable in worship? From the list below, check any styles you find unacceptable for a Sunday church service.

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| ____ Folk Music | ____ Rock 'n' Roll |
| ____ Jazz and the blues | ____ Classical/symphonic |
| ____ Opera | ____ Musical comedies |
| ____ Sacred music | ____ Gospel music |

____ Chamber music
____ Other: _____

19. Describe briefly in your own words why this/these styles are unacceptable?

20. Would you consider any of these music styles you listed as unacceptable to be acceptable for use in some worship setting outside of the regular Sunday church service? E.g. Church camp, a Bible study, a retreat.

Yes ____ No ____

21. How would you rate the importance of the music program in your church?

- a. Very important
- b. Important
- c. Somewhat important
- d. There is no program, and I do not care to have one started.
- e. There is no program, and I wish there were one.

22. How would you rate the music program in your church?

- a. Excellent
- b. Good
- c. Needs Improvement
- d. Drastic change is called for

23. What part of the music in worship is the most meaningful to you? (List the top three preferences by numbering them 1st, 2nd, and 3rd.)

____ Hymns/Congregational singing
____ Anthems sung by the choir and/or soloists
____ Settings of the Psalms
____ Praise music
____ Organ music
____ Instrumental Music
____ Other: _____

24. How important is singing to you? (Your own involvement in singing)

- a. Very important

- b. Important
- c. Somewhat important
- d. I don't sing

25. Do you have a favorite hymn/praise song? (circle all that apply)

- a. a few hymns
- b. many hymns
- c. none of the hymns
- d. a few praise songs
- e. many praise songs
- f. none of the praise songs

Why are these your favorites?

26. Do you have a hymn/praise song that you do not like? (circle all that apply)

- d. a few hymns
- e. many hymns
- f. none of the hymns
- g. a few praise songs
- h. many praise songs
- i. none of the praise songs

Why do you not like these?

27. Do you like to sing? Yes____ No____

28. Describe some of the feelings you have when singing in worship.

29. In what ways, if any, are your feelings when singing in worship connected to your feelings about God?

30. In what ways, if at all, does singing in worship help you understand God?

31. In what ways, if at all, has singing in worship changed your viewpoint about the world?

32. In your opinion what is most important about the music you sing in worship?

- a. the words
- b. the melody
- c. both the words and the melody
- d. the music style

33. What if the words to your favorite hymn/praise song were changed, but the melody remained the same. Would that be ok?

(e.g. "Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved *and set me free*...")

"Holy, Holy, Holy, *God of all creation*..."

"...from the earth to the cross, *God's love You gave*..."

Yes_____ No_____

34. Which of these hymn titles best describes how you think about God?

_____ "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise" or

_____ "What A Friend We Have in Jesus"

_____ Other (Please give title) _____

35. Which of these statements best fits your image of God:

_____ God is a judge. God is a lawgiver who expects righteous behavior from us, and will punish those who fall short.

_____ God is like a merciful and forgiving parent. God understands our human frailties, and quickly forgives us when we fail to live up to God's standards.

_____ God is both a lawgiver and a forgiving parent. Humans experience both the justice and the mercy of God.

36. Which statement is more accurate for you?

_____ God gets directly involved in human affairs through miracles.

_____ God works in human affairs primarily through natural processes.

37. When you think of God which image do you usually see:
God as

_____ Father

_____ Mother

_____ Creator

_____ Son

_____ Jesus

_____ Jesus Christ

_____ Redeemer

_____ Advocate

_____ Holy Spirit

_____ Breath of Life

_____ Other (please name) _____

Which of the above descriptions for God is the *least* helpful for you?

38. What other word images for God do you commonly use when thinking about God?

_____ Holy One

_____ Judge

_____ Shepherd

_____ Rock

_____ Bread of Life

_____ Light of the World

_____ Savior

_____ Lord

<input type="checkbox"/> Friend	<input type="checkbox"/> Brother
<input type="checkbox"/> Healer	<input type="checkbox"/> Gift-giver
<input type="checkbox"/> Fire	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please name) _____	

39. Which of these statements makes the most sense to you:

☐ All people are sinners. They have no hope except through the saving power of God through Jesus Christ.

☐ All people are children of God. They are created in God's own image and they are lovingly re-created through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

☐ All people are fallible and finite, yet they are brought to perfection through the inner workings of the Holy Spirit.

40. Which statement best sums up your understanding of how your church relates to the rest of the world?

☐ Our church is a powerful witness to a way of living that is contrary to how the rest of the world says we ought to live.

☐ Our church is a safe haven from the rest of the world.

☐ Our church is engaged with the rest of the world, working to build up God's Kingdom.

41. Which is more important in your opinion?

☐ All people are children of God

☐ What a person does with their life.

☐ Personal and spiritual growth.

42. Which statement best describes your thoughts about creation?

☐ We are to be in harmony with creation, and are dependent upon the cycles of seasons, rain and sunshine for our daily lives.

☐ We can have some control over creation and the elements, but these things can affect our plans and activities.

____ We have no control over creation.

43. Which statement best describes your understanding about humanity's relation to creation?

____ Creation is here to serve humanity.

____ Creation is here to serve humanity, but humanity is responsible for being good stewards of creation.

____ Humanity is but a part of creation

44. How do you think about "time?"

____ Time is precious. That's why we must begin and end on time.

____ Time is to be endured. We just need to get through this particular time.

____ Time is relational. It's more important to begin when everyone is here, and end when everyone has a sense that it is time to close.

45. When thinking about your church, do you mostly

____ think about the past, and the "glory days" of your church?

____ think, "If we can just make it through this week without a problem?"

____ think, "What can we do today that will help us become better tomorrow?"

46. When you hear the word "HOPE" what images come to mind?

____ eternal life

____ the Second Coming of Christ

____ resurrection

____ Other (please name) _____

47. Which of these metaphors for church fit your understanding of church?

____ Institution of Salvation

____ Intimate Community of the Spirit

____ Sacrament of Salvation

____ Herald of Good News

____ Servant of the Servant Lord

____ Other (please name) _____

48. Is your church first and foremost a

____ Hospital for Sinners? (all are welcomed, whatever their life situation)

____ Holy Communion of Saints (there are certain ethical and moral standards for membership)

49. Should any of the following **not** be a part of church leadership, programming and worship?

____ Children

____ the Elderly

____ Women

____ Persons with physical or mental disabilities

____ Gay and Lesbian persons

____ People of diverse racial and ethnic identities

50. Which do you think is the primary mission focus of your church?

____ social, political and economic issues

____ encouraging individuals to be involved in the world

____ calling people to salvation and eternal life

____ being a safe haven from the world

51. Which statement best describes your church?

____ We are survivors. The world is overwhelming, but we are “hanging in there.”

____ We are crusaders. We are looking for ways to make God’s presence know in the world.

____ We are a pillar. We’ve been here a long time. We are taking responsibility for the well being of the larger community in which we live.

____ We are pilgrims. We primarily focus on caring for those who have come from other places and have no roots here.

____ We are servants. We care for and support those in need.

52. Which statement best describes the overall understanding of your church?

____ The world seems confusing and illusory, but things will all work out in the end.

____ The world is violent and cruel. People are basically sinful and will live eternally in damnation unless they repent

____ Though the world is confusing or violent or cruel, we can expect miracles through the intervening power of the Holy Spirit.

____ No matter how unjust and confusing the world may be, there is hope in communities that are based on love, compassion, and the desire to do what one can to make the world a better place.

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